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Breaking the Silence: The Role of Public Speaking Courses in Reducing Communication Apprehension Among University Students – Insights from Dubai

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Research Article

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Abstract

Background/purpose. This study sheds new light on communication apprehension (CA) by specifically analyzing the role of public speaking courses in addressing anxiety concerns among university students. It offers a nuanced understanding of student viewpoints within the context of a public speaking course in a non-Western setting.

Methods/Materials. Focus groups—a methodology that has not been widely utilized in CA research—were used to understand student viewpoints. Focus group discussions were carried out using a semi-structured approach, using the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) at the start of the discussion. Thematic analysis was used to categorize recurring patterns in the data.

Results. The dominant themes emerging from the study were labeled as "enhancers" and "diminishers" of public speaking anxiety. The research findings, especially sub-themes relating to grading and group work, are noteworthy, offering valuable insights into student perspectives.

Conclusion. This study will aid educators in reimagining curriculum instruction and design. These findings have implications for the areas of oral communication, public speaking anxiety, and global higher education.

1. Introduction

Communication apprehension (CA) has received much attention in social science research (McCroskey, 1970; McCroskey et al., 2014). McCroskey (1970) defined communication apprehension as "a broadly-based anxiety related to oral communication" (p. 3). This term has been interchangeably used in literature with public speaking anxiety (Bodie, 2010), stage fright (Bippus et al., 1999), and glossophobia (Hancock et al., 2010). Symptoms of speaking anxiety include sweating, weak knees, heart palpitations, nausea, shaky voice, etc. (McCroskey et al., 1997; Nutt & Ballenger, 2003).

The fear of public speaking can limit a student's ability to function effectively in higher education settings. Reduction in communication apprehension is one of the primary goals of a basic public speaking communication course (Hunter et al., 2014). The introductory public speaking course at the university has long served as the main avenue for cultivating public speaking competence and is typically part of the general education program. However, college students tend to delay enrolling in public speaking courses due to fear and anxiety, prompting them to request institutions to offer alternative options (Lorenz, 2017). A plethora of research studies have reported that more than 70% of college students, including generation Z (born after 2000), struggle to express themselves effectively in front of large audiences due to anxiety (Motavalli, 2015; Dwyer & Davidson, 2012; Dwyer & Davidson, 2021; LeFebvre et al., 2018; Grieve et al., 2021).

Choi et al. (2015) noted that the negative impact of communication apprehension has sparked increasing interest among scholars and practitioners in reevaluating communication training in educational settings. Bragg (2017) suggests that innovative and appropriate pedagogical methods must be implemented to address communication apprehension and create a supportive environment that minimizes its impact on students.

1.1. Current Study

The current study examines the impact of the public speaking course in mitigating communication apprehension (CA) among students at a private university in Dubai. The unease and anxiety linked to communication apprehension (CA) have been classified as 'trait anxiety' and 'state anxiety' in communication scholarship (Montag, 2023; Prasad et al., 2021; Spielberger, 1983). According to Pappamihiel (2002), trait anxiety is defined as a tendency in certain individuals to experience heightened anxiety more frequently, irrespective of the circumstances. In contrast, state anxiety is a form of social anxiety that arises in specific situations, like during a class presentation or a job interview. As McCroskey (1984) points out, "this type of communication apprehension (CA) is presumed to be more a function of the situational constraints introduced by the other person or group than by the personality of the individual" (p. 18).

This research was conducted by a faculty member who teaches public speaking courses to a large number of students across multiple sections at a private university in Dubai, UAE. The course design includes two minor speeches, one group project, two major speeches, an oral speech analysis assignment, and pop quizzes. A blend of exposure therapy (Finn et al., 2009), cognitive modification (Bodie, 2010), and skills training (Robinson, 1997) are utilized to work on speaker competence and anxiety reduction. Exposure therapy entails exposing participants repeatedly to fear-arousing stimuli - resulting in reduced anxiety. Examples would include asking students to present speeches in varied formats and at different durations over the course of the semester to reduce speaking reticence.

On the other hand, cognitive modification techniques help students acquire a positive mindset for approaching public speaking situations. Fremouw and Scott (1979) focused on training students to identify their negative attitudes toward public speaking and replace them with positive experiences. As described by LeFebvre (2019), skills training equips students to develop

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communicative competence by learning and honing skills related to effective speech construction and delivery, including audience analysis, content organization, research, and nonverbal behavior.

Existing literature on communication apprehension (Grieve et al., 2021; Hunter et al., 2014; McCroskey, 2007) has used quantitative designs to document public speaking state anxiety concerns among university students in Western education settings. Few studies have employed qualitative methods, particularly focus groups, to investigate diverse non-Western samples. The current study aims to investigate state anxiety among students using a qualitative design at a private university in Dubai, delving into their unique perspectives and experiences on the subject. The data generated will help us understand how the public speaking course is faring regarding anxiety reduction and management techniques. This will result in a holistic understanding of student fears and the strategies needed to address and make necessary modifications in the course based on student feedback. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What factors contribute to anxiety among students enrolled in a public speaking course at a private university in Dubai?

RQ2: To what extent does a public speaking course reduce communication apprehension among students at a private university in Dubai?

2. Method

2.1. Design

This study employs a case study design, utilizing focus groups as the primary data collection method. Focus groups were conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of student perspectives on communication apprehension experienced in a public speaking course. Focus groups have the potential to 'illuminate things' – which might be hard to pin down in a survey method (Waterton & Wyne, 1999, p. 129). According to Rahiem et al. (2021), this data generation approach allows us to have a nuanced grasp of the phenomenon through the detailed accounts of those who experienced it.

2.2. Participants & Procedure

Focus group participants were enrolled in a multi-section, standardized public speaking course at a private American University in Dubai, UAE. Six focus group sessions were conducted with a total of 33 undergraduate university students in exchange for partial credit. Each group consisted of 4-8 participants who were in the final weeks of the semester, close to finishing the course. These participants were exposed to exposure therapy, cognitive modification techniques, and skills training over the course of the semester. The criteria for inclusion in the study were: (a) respondents had to be undergraduate students enrolled in the public speaking course, and (b) they had to be reasonably proficient in the English language.

Prior to data collection, students enrolled in the public speaking sections were informed about the study verbally and via blackboard announcement. Interested candidates were briefed on the nature of the study, and a consent form was signed before the start of the sessions. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for all participants. The faculty member teaching the course moderated all six focus group sessions - which lasted approximately 60 minutes each. Focus group discussions were carried out using a semi-structured approach, using the nominal group technique (NGT) at the start of the discussion. This was done to reduce the possibility of groupthink. According to Hashmi and Waheed (2020), the Nominal Group Technique ensures that "all participant views are equally represented, and participants are primed to think independently from the outset" to avoid groupthink (p.5). Participants were instructed to spend one to two minutes writing down some of their fears about speaking in public. Once every participant had shared their thoughts on speaking

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fears, a follow-up discussion was initiated to enable a deeper exchange of ideas. Examples of discussion-generating questions include: What are the words that come to your mind when you hear the word public speaking? What do you associate public speaking with? How do you cope with anxiety? Have your perceptions and anxiety toward communication changed somewhat over the course of this semester? What can the university do to support your needs?

Each of the six sessions was digitally recorded and transcribed immediately after completion. The coding method used was inductive, as Patton (2002) describes, where "patterns, themes, and categories are discovered within the data" (p. 453), all guided by the study's main research question. The researcher deeply engaged with the data, repeatedly reading the transcripts, followed by the application of open and axial coding. This process allowed for the identification of common themes and patterns that emerged through constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The codes in the transcripts were color-coded to distinguish different categories and ideas. Also, the written data recorded in Microsoft Word was sequentially numbered, with each line of the transcript corresponding to a specific number. This approach was used to further segment the data, making the data reduction and retrieval process more efficient.

Participant validation established the research's trustworthiness. The FGD transcripts were emailed to the study participants. All were requested to review the transcripts to ensure that the transcribed content accurately reflected their views. Out of the 33 participants, 7 responded in the affirmative via email.

The university's research ethics committee approved this study.

3. Results

The results presented are in response to the two main research questions guiding this study: 1) What factors contribute to anxiety among students enrolled in a public speaking course at a private university in Dubai? 2) To what extent does a public speaking course reduce communication apprehension among students at a private university in Dubai? Two central themes emerged from the focus group data, categorized as (a) enhancers of public speaking anxiety and (b) diminishers of public speaking anxiety. These themes are further categorized into sub-themes.

3.1. Enhancers of public speaking anxiety

When the focus group participants were probed about their perceptions concerning public speaking - most of them cited with increased emphasis: "the fear of judgment," "the fear of being exposed," "the fear of negative evaluation," and "anxiety about the professor and their teaching style," etc. The sub-themes corresponding to anxiety-inducing enhancers have been labeled as conspicuousness, grading, and classroom dynamics.

3.2. Conspicuousness

Everyone's just staring at you, and it's dead silence, right? (FG4, Mahelia)

Across the focus groups, speaking in front of an audience emerged as the most significant factor contributing to public speaking anxiety. In all six focus group sessions, the recurring narrative surrounding speaker conspicuousness was nearly unanimous. Most of the students felt that audience scrutiny was intimidating, leaving them exposed and vulnerable. Alyana expressed this uneasiness by stating, "I worry about being the center of attraction" (FG3). Winston also alluded to the anxiety-inducing 'judgment element' when facing a crowd, "Like suddenly - all eyes are on you!" (FG1). Malik asserted, "You expect a lot from yourself. The professor expects a lot. Then, the students … like basically you fear that they might judge you!" (FG4). Santana opined, "Everyone is looking at you, and you feel, like … exposed" (FG6). In a similar vein, Robin stated that the fear of 'messing up' in front of others triggers nausea and sweating, "Fear of judgment makes it a threatening experience." He

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further added, "We care so much about how other people think of us. So if we mess up, then like, people can take like a wrong image or a wrong idea about us" (FG5). The fear of 'audience judgment' was repeatedly cited as the most anxiety-inducing aspect in relation to public speaking. Keith explains this perceived threat in the following words:

> *I just, like, avoid eye contact with the audience. Like, if there is an eye, I just look at the middle of it because I feel like when I memorize the speech or like when I'm ready for a speech when I make eye contact with a different audience and try to, like, look around, everything just flows out of my head (FG1).*

3.3. Grading

> ***Chris:*** *But I feel like, actually, in public speaking, I'm more nervous than I am in any other classes.*
>
> ***Moderator:*** *Why? Why do you think like that? What's the reason for that?*
>
> ***Chris:*** *I think just because my grades specifically just depend on that. (FG4)*

Another dominant theme that emerged from the focus group data was the frequency of discussion concerning evaluation and grading in the public speaking course. Participants across the spectrum voiced their reservations about the course being graded and how it impacted the entire experience:

> *In most other classes, I'm always keen on participating when we have to present or talk or anything like that. Presentations don't stress me out; I enjoy talking and all of that. But with this course, it's harder to enjoy when you're critiqued for every movement. Like before, there used to be anxiety, but now here it's like there's anxiety, plus a hundred other things going through your mind. You have to really monitor every little movement, every little thing, and you dwell on that because you are looking at the critical side of everything rather than enjoying the process of presenting to a group of people, which can be fun. (FG3, Liya)*

Participants stated that students already experience heightened anxiety just from having to present in front of an audience, but being graded on it further exacerbates their communication apprehension. Tony remarked, “We fear losing our grades if we don't perform as expected, right? So, when there are no grades, I think people would be more at ease” (FG4). In another session, Marina also commented, “I feel like when I present in other courses, I'm not that stressed, but when the course is just meant for this specific thing, it makes me more stressed” (FG6).

In support of their arguments, students also highlighted how this course can be more favorable towards a certain personality type, making it more challenging for introverts. On this point, Andy observed, "I feel like people who are introverted or shy or who aren't comfortable speaking publicly, they're at a disadvantage." He added, "Students who are more outgoing will have a higher chance of doing better as opposed to those who are shy" (FG5). Some students also shared their apprehensions about the instructor taking notes during student presentations. Tahir pointed out that "it triggers anxiety in us to see professors taking notes" (FG6). Novice students begin to question their abilities and can become mired in self-doubt:

> *What sometimes distracts me when I'm presenting is when the professor is taking notes. I understand that they have to because they'll forget, but at the same time, it's a bit distracting for me because I'm like, what are they thinking? What are they taking notes about? (FG1, Sasha).*

Probing the participants further, the moderator of the focus groups asked the respondents to share their thoughts on how the university can support the students. Many of them suggested that the public speaking course should be made a non-graded Gen Ed course. Karim suggested, "Students should come to this class and improve and learn and do many speeches, but it must not impact our own academic success" (FG3). Leena expressed a similar viewpoint in another focus group session:

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There are many ways that students could be rewarded so that they still have the motivation to perform, but at the same time, it would not affect their GPA. Students can be graded for participation but no grade for the presentation. So, regardless of the content and the way you are delivering, just going there and presenting and speaking ensures that you have satisfied the graduation criteria" (FG5).

3.4. Classroom Dynamics

I think the professor is the main thing (FG6, Sandy).

Many participants alluded to the role of the professor in fostering a positive or negative class climate. Professors who looked "unapproachable" and "intimidating" made students more apprehensive about public speaking. Mindy contended, "I feel like if the professor is intimidating, definitely it's going to affect the way that the speaker is going to talk because you already have stress" (FG2). Tony reiterated the same point in the discussion: "There are so many students that are already nervous, so if they feel like the professor is not approachable or strict, they already have this added fear" (FG2). Students pointed out that a conducive classroom environment created by the professor is essential for them to express their authentic selves. To this point, Lily added, "I feel like the more intimidating the professor is, the less of a of your actual feelings you're going to show -- because you're not going to show your true self (FG4). Dina also remarked, "Already the content is too much. And then if you also have an intimidating professor -- that's become very overwhelming" (FG4). A student made a comparison between the way driving instructors and teachers behave, observing that the likelihood of making mistakes increases due to the instructor's personality and approach:

I was doing my driving test, and the guy who was my examiner had the face of someone who really doesn't want you to do well - like, I was getting the vibes that I just want you to exit from the vehicle, and I don't want to ever see you again. And funny or not, I failed that test. And it's really because I was very intimidated by the look, the presence, the atmosphere.

She further elaborated:

The second guy I went to take my exam with was very calm, smiling all the time, and I was like, okay, this is gonna be good and funny enough. I passed that test. The same goes for public speaking, in fostering a nice environment for students to really speak up. When the professor is nicer, it's less intimidating; it's way better because the course is already intimidating enough. Reassurance from the professor does help (FG6, Jassim).

3.5. Diminishers of public speaking anxiety

In order to assess the impact of the public speaking course, study participants were asked if their level of apprehension reduced or not over the course of the semester. Many among them responded in affirmative and referred to "teaching techniques" and "teamwork" playing a significant role in anxiety reduction. The sub-themes corresponding to anxiety diminishers have been labeled as exposure therapy, breathing techniques and cognitive modification, skills training, and group work.

3.6. Exposure Therapy

Now that we're more in the rhythm of speaking -- that makes it easier (FG1, Sasha).

Many in the focus group discussion brought attention to the aspect of repeated speaking activities in class, resulting in anxiety reduction. Students mentioned that the graded speeches and various classroom warm-ups allowed them to express themselves with more confidence as the semester progressed. Karim remarked, "I'd say in the first minor speech, I was the most nervous, and then throughout the other speeches, I got less nervous (FG3). Dina also remarked, "Now I feel like because I've done it so many times – I'm comfortable speaking in front of a crowd." She summed it up in the following way:

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The many times that we did, like some of the minor speeches and the major speeches, the group presentation and even the news, it really kind of made me, in a way better in terms of speaking in front of people, managing my nerves and really getting my thoughts out in a really clear way (FG6).

Study participants also specifically mentioned certain speaking activities in class that they found fun and helpful. Mahelia found the impromptu speeches to be "An excellent in-class activity, where we have to open the sticky note and read it out loud. And I just thought that was just so helpful (FG4). Liam appreciated an in-class activity where, at the start of the class, all students had to share a piece of news from the world. He commented, “When the whole class had to share the news, like, you just have to do it…and it's every class, so it's a good practice” (FG6).

Keith considered in-class debate participation important in reducing communication apprehension. He remarked, "I really did find the debates helpful, where you had to go up and speak in front of everyone. That was like a practice for me for any speech" (FG1).

3.7. Relaxation Techniques and Cognitive Modification

I breathe, inhale, and exhale, and I just pretend I'm talking to myself in the mirror like I always do. Because usually, when I'm in front of people, I tend to stress (FG1, Sarah)

Students discussed different techniques to manage apprehension that enabled them to approach communication scenarios with relative calm. A good amount of discussion centered around breathing techniques discussed in class to help reduce anxiety. Lily managed her nerves by relying on breathing techniques before the start of a speech, "Breathing techniques help me a lot, and I just keep on reminding myself that you're also in a room full of students who are also nervous as well… so just speak casually (FG4). Sara stated, "I feel like if you imagine that you are calm, your breathing automatically gets like the confidence thing. And then suddenly you realize that your heart doesn't start beating fast anymore (FG2). Another student, Hakim, explained how he copes:

Like I just try to remember that we're all going through the same thing. I just try to keep myself calm and honestly, I pray - keeps me calm - keeps me grounded and just take a deep breath (FG3).

Sasha shares his insights on cognitive reframing strategies:

What has changed is my perspective. So, when I go up and start speaking, I've started to think differently because back then, I used to focus more on myself. How am I performing now? Now, I just focus more on what I am delivering and saying, and that has really helped me get my point across (FG1).

3.8. Skills Training

I've learned how to communicate with people, and I've learned the techniques and how people can actually like… perceive you (FG6, Hasan).

Learning about non-verbal behavior and receiving positive feedback from the professor were reported by many as helpful in reducing public speaking anxiety. Nilesh spoke about the significance of understanding nonverbal behavior in effective speech delivery:

We were talking about body language, verbal, and nonverbal and so on. And I remember after the class I actually had a meeting. So, when I went to my meeting, I used everything that we talked in class about. I was like, okay, you know what? I'm going to apply everything that I’ve learnt and it turned out really good, like I was speaking so confidently - I was really proud of myself (FG1).

The public speaking course pushed Alayna out of her “comfort zone”, she said, “Now I'm more aware of my own gestures, for example, and getting closer to the audience and delivering a speech

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that's not monotone" (FG3). For Ali, viewing online speeches helped in gaining perspective, "Watching YouTube videos and noticing nonverbal behavior of speakers really helps in getting clarity about effective speech delivery" (FG2).

Some students considered feedback an important factor in attaining confidence. Ehram remarked, "Getting good feedback from a professor is like such an amazing feeling to have. " She further added, "You're getting genuine feedback, and you're genuinely being given the chance to work yourself up and and being given the path to do so" (FG2). Malik, in another session, stated:

> *The professor's comments help a great deal. When we get feedback… like you're doing very well, the way you speak is good, it enhances our motivation. So, you feel more confident for your next one. Also, knowing that the professor has bachelor's, master's and PhD… so, like getting good comments from a doctor in that field makes you feel so motivated (FG4).*

3.9. Groupwork

> *The attention isn't solely on you (FG3, Joud).*

Previously, the public speaking course focused primarily on solo speeches throughout the semester. It was later revised to include a group project and collaborative in-class activities. Students were asked to give their opinions on the incorporation of the group presentation and teamwork. The dominant consensus across the spectrum was that the group presentation helped reduce communication anxiety. Karim was of the view that group work "removes the pressure" from the student, "It's easier to just feel comfortable when you have people around you during oral presentations… there's a sense of safety" (FG3). In the same vein, Alayana commented, "During group work, I can like chill. It's not on me… (FG3). Leena, in another focus group session, remarked, "It (group work) does make the workload and the stress feel lighter and easier" (FG5). Tony explained:

> *When people have to share the stage with you when you're speaking, you know that for the next two minutes, I'm going to pass the floor to someone else, and that sort of relaxes you (FG6).*

Students described groups as "mini support systems," which made them at ease on stage. Nilesh remarked, "It's not just you on that podium, but you have like a backup support. So, I think group discussions, group activities, icebreakers, and more like discussion-based activities are really helpful" (FG1). Groupwork was also preferred by some, as it was seen as a format that could lead to better overall scores for all team members – reducing anxiety about the grade. Maya commented:

> *The grade would automatically go up if two presenters are really good. So, I think having a person who's pushing everyone is also giving other people the chance to show up, and that person is kind of also helping that person to improve him or herself in the future (FG5).*

Some students acknowledged challenges attached to group work but still considered group presentations helpful in reducing communication reticence:

> *When you present with people on the day of the presentation, you feel that your nerves are calmer - you're not really doing this by yourself. But, yeah, it always has its upsides and downsides, but I really think that the upsides outweigh the negatives (FG6, Dina).*

4. Discussion

A public speaking course significantly impacts student's anxiety levels, acting as both a source of stress and a means to manage and reduce it. The aim of this study was twofold: to identify anxiety-inducing factors in a public speaking course among students enrolled at a private university in Dubai and to examine the extent to which students were able to manage their communication apprehension over the semester. The themes emerging from the focus group data were labeled as enhancers of public speaking anxiety and diminishers of public speaking anxiety. The anxiety-inducing enhancers were further sub-categorized as conspicuousness, grading, and classroom dynamics.

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Anxiety-inducing factors such as conspicuousness were the most recurring theme in the FGDs, followed by grading and classroom dynamics fostered by the professor. The findings related to 'conspicuousness' and 'classroom dynamics' lend support to previous research conducted by LeFebvre et al. (2020) and Zhang (2005), which reported heightened anxiety levels among university students, attributed to their sense of being evaluated by the audience and the power distance that exists between professors and students.

Factors that helped reduce communication apprehension in the public speaking course were exposure therapy, breathing techniques and cognitive modification, skills training, and group work. The findings related to teaching techniques are consistent with the findings of previous scholars (Bodie, 2010) and (Allen et al., 1989) that highlight the importance of intervention strategies embedded in the course design to address communication apprehension.

The most noteworthy aspect of this study is the two key findings, *grading* and *group work* in relation to communication anxiety, providing a more nuanced view of the student mindset that had not been closely studied earlier. In relation to student perspectives on discussions surrounding grading, there was a near-unanimous consensus across the spectrum that the public speaking course should be a non-graded course in the university. Students already feel anxious when standing and presenting in front of a crowd, and the added scrutiny in the form of grading further increases their anxiety levels. These findings should give us a pause - to think and reflect on what we are trying to achieve in a public speaking course. If the fundamental purpose of a public speaking course is to reduce anxiety, then maybe a rethink is needed on the assessment strategy in public speaking pedagogy. Gehrke (2016) states that a public speaking course should give "students leeway and low stakes so they will risk failure, take chances, and experiment in style and delivery." Assessing students as they speak stifles creativity and elevates stress among students. In actuality, "grading and the stakes associated with student grades may well be the greatest structural impediments to good teaching and student engagement" (p. 258).

Focus group discussions on the significance of group work in the context of the public speaking course design were quite insightful. While there are studies that talk about the significance of teamwork, there is a dearth of research with regard to the incorporation of group projects and presentations in a public speaking course. These findings suggest that there is great value in incorporating group presentations and collaborations in a public speaking course to help reduce communication apprehension among students.

Findings related to classroom dynamics are also important - in that – it gives communication scholars and instructors a chance to really understand and reflect on their role in anxiety management in classroom settings. Study findings should give perspective to instructors to me mindful of their verbal and non-verbal communication and teaching approach to create a conducive environment for students to thrive and grow.

Extant scholarship on communication has heavily relied on quantitative methods to examine public speaking anxiety. This qualitative study has ventured to provide a detailed account of student perspectives on communication apprehension in an interactive focus group setting. Students were given a platform to articulate their thought processes and highlight specific activities and strategies in the classroom that impacted their anxiety levels. This study design allowed the researcher to gain a nuanced understanding of student viewpoints within the context of a public speaking course in a non-western setting.

As with any research endeavor, this study comes with its limitations. Firstly, the results should be interpreted carefully due to the small sample size. Because this is a qualitative study, broad generalization claims cannot be made. That said, the aim of qualitative research is not to generalize but to gain a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon from the participants' perspectives.

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That is what this study has strived to achieve. It is up to the reader to evaluate the applicability of these findings to similar contexts.

Furthermore, the focus group moderator was also the instructor of the public speaking course. While students expressed their opinions in a relaxed setting, some may have refrained from sharing fully due to the existing power dynamics in the room.

Future research should explore communication apprehension in public speaking courses across both Western and Eastern academic settings to arrive at a more holistic understanding of the issue. Follow-up studies should consider cross-cultural similarities and differences to make more substantial claims about dominant student perspectives in a global context.

Insights gleaned from students' experiences and perspectives, particularly within an increasingly interconnected global landscape, will empower university administrators and educators to reevaluate policies relating to assessments and course design in oral communication courses. By integrating diverse international viewpoints, institutions can ensure that these policies remain relevant, equitable, and beneficial for all stakeholders.

Declarations

Author Contributions. The author independently carried out all aspects of this study, including conceptualization, methodology, data collection, analysis, and manuscript preparation.
Conflicts of Interest. The author declares no conflict of interest.
Funding. None
Ethical Approval. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University -- approval number [RS/109/01/23]. All participants provided informed consent prior to their inclusion in the study.
Data Availability Statement. The complete/raw data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.
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