

Glossophobia among Engineering Learners: A Case Study at a Technical University

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<https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v18i1.17154>

Received: 4 August 2021

Accepted: 4 January 2022

Date Published Online: 31 January 2022

Published: 31 January 2022

Abstract: Glossophobia or fear of public speaking is commonly experienced by tertiary learners during classroom presentations. This study intends to examine the speech anxiety level experienced by engineering learners and the relationship between the learners' English language proficiency and their speech anxiety. The study will also identify the causes of public speaking anxiety among these engineering learners. The samples were 65 Engineering Diploma students who responded to McCroskey's Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) questionnaire. The students' English language grades at SPM level were used as the measurement of their English language proficiency. The findings showed the students' speech anxiety is at moderate level (M= 105.9) and there was a weak negative relationship between total PRPSA scores and SPM English language grades ($r = -.149$, $n = 65$, $p > 0.05$). Mere thoughts of presenting a speech with undue worries of being asked questions were the causes of their speech anxiety. Therefore, it is proposed engineering learners be given ample public speaking trainings through planned programmes and engineering curriculum planners include elements of public speaking in engineering subjects. Public speaking skills will be an added value and increase engineering graduate employability in future.

Keywords: Communication apprehension, Glossophobia, Public speaking, Speech anxiety, PRPSA

1. Introduction

The emergence of Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0) has brought about substantial changes to the economy, lifestyle, health, education, labour markets and skills development. IR 4.0 is a set of rapidly evolving and converging technologies which has altered the workforce setting altogether. Hence, it is not an irony that IR 4.0 is increasingly shaping the job market in many developing economies. Consequently, to be employable in future, IR 4.0 requires job seekers to equip themselves with new skills that can be used to handle the rapid breakthroughs brought about by modern technology (Mohd Kamaruzaman, 2019). In other words, there is a new set of employability skills which graduates now have to master.

Employability skills are job readiness skills which prepare students become competent and competitive workers after they have completed their studies (Mohamad Zuber, et al., 2020). Gowsalya and Ashok Kumar (2017) stressed that it was necessary to create awareness among students to increase employability skills along with achieving good academic grades as it was feared the students after their graduation may not be able to sustain in their job due to lack of skills and tolerance. Normala et al. (2014) claimed that employability skills include the possession of attributes, skills and technical knowledge as required for a job which ensure workers have the capability to be effective in the workplace and adjust themselves towards various changes suited with the working environment. In the national front, Graduate

Employability Blueprint (2012-2017) detailed elements of graduate employability and aspired that a minimum 75% graduates would be able to secure employment upon graduation (Faizah, 2019). Since then, 'graduate employability' has become an important achievement target and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of all public universities in Malaysia.

A more recent finding on the employability skills, Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) Employer Insights Report claimed that 13,000 employers all over the world had rated communication as one of the four top skills as most important among recent graduates. Traditionally, universities have been focusing greatly on the depth of knowledge and technical skills but now they have accepted the need to develop students holistically, not just academically (The Star, Jan, 2021). That being said, it is now crystal clear that communication skills are extremely important as far as graduate employability is concerned.

Being able to communicate well in English in Malaysia is crucial as our country posits itself as a regional business hub and aspires to lead in the global digital economy. In relation to communication skills being the centre point in the current graduate employability issue, Vasanthakumari (2019) was of the opinion that it was essential to integrate hard skills with soft skills to excel in one's career. She further reiterated that soft skills refer to skills which are related to people, social and personal career attributes. Acquiring a job will need hard skills whereas to ensure we are selected for the job requires soft skills. The same opinions have been propounded by several researchers (Lazarus, 2013; Griffith & Hoppner, 2013; Seetha, 2014). These researchers believed employees need to have more than technical skills in order to compete in this globalised era. They agreed that good employees would strive to have a mix of hard and soft skill competencies. Without doubt it is of paramount importance to avail oneself with the much needed workplace soft skills.

The significance of acquiring public speaking and effective communication skills by graduates has been acknowledged in the Workforce-Skills Preparedness Report (PayScale, 2016). This report states that for the purpose of graduate recruitment, it is pertinent that college graduates should display confidence in communication, articulate ideas competently and speak proficiently in public. Evidently, business organizations at all levels are prioritizing job applicants who are competent in oral, written, and presentation skills. Therefore, aspiring employees should master these soft skills in order to land a job in the ever competitive job market. Supporting this view, Chollet et al. (2015) claimed that having good communication skills bring whole lot of immense benefits such as personal growth, career advancement, and strong leadership. Also in total agreement with earlier researchers, Shyam and Joy (2016) reaffirmed that more often than not, real life seeks an individual to speak in public that culminate in better career prospects and other opportunities. Undoubtedly the need for public speaking skills become more profound as individuals advance in their careers and this is when they are more likely to present and give their opinions in meetings, seminars and conferences (Raja, 2017).

It has been found that speaking in front of a number of people causes fears and uneasiness among individuals (Cagatay, 2015; Dwyer & Davidson, 2012; Tse, 2012). In a very recent study, Dansieh (2021) discovered that despite students' recognition of public speaking as an important and indispensable communicative skill required in both their academic and future professional lives, majority of them tend to have a great phobia for speaking before an audience of any size. In an earlier research, Arnold (2018) maintained that public speaking anxiety (PSA), a form of social phobia, is a common and debilitating issue for many professionals, affecting approximately 70% of the population to varying degrees. He further stressed that as communication skills particularly public speaking skills have been given a paramount importance in the workplace, those with high PSA may face serious problems in advancing in their careers.

Glossophobia or public speaking anxiety has been defined as "the fear of speaking in public", "communication apprehension", "nervousness" or "speech anxiety" (McCroskey, 2001; Segar, 2018; Black, 2019). McCroskey (2001) further described that communication apprehension refers to an individual's "fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons." Basically communication apprehension is a psychological response to evaluation. The American Psychological Association (APA) Dictionary of Psychology defines public speaking anxiety as the fear of giving a speech or presentation in public because of the expectation of being negatively evaluated or humiliated by others.

In Malaysia, graduate employability and the graduates' preparedness for the workforce has inevitably been a perennial issue. Gaining employment right after completing a university degree is no longer a guarantee. Studies have found that unemployment of local graduates could be attributed to graduates being generally high achievers academically but lacking in soft skills such as good communication, leadership, and analytical skills (Shakir, 2009). Chan and Selvam (2016) proposed some prominent skills which the industry would want the graduating college students to be equipped with and profoundly claimed communication skill is one of them.

Nooriah and Zakiah (2017) agreed that large numbers of first degree students in public universities are still jobless due to among others, poor communication skills. With these findings, it is critical for our future undergraduates to offer extra qualities in terms of soft skills to their potential employers.

Mohd Kamaruzaman et al. (2020) listed the six attributes of communication skills which are required in engineering graduates. Among the attributes are the abilities to effectively speak with audience, convey a clear written communication, communicate with people from different background, deliver presentations, express own idea and listen and give appropriate feedback. Therefore, with concerns of glossophobia undermining our graduates' ability to speak up and speak out well, the present study examines UTeM engineering students' level of speech anxiety while carrying out English public speaking activities. Another purpose for this study is to establish if there is a relationship between the engineering students' speech anxiety level and their English language proficiency level. The study also determines to find out the causes for this particular anxiety among the engineering students. It is believed that the findings of the present study will provide insights into how English language instructors in the higher learning institutions can help train our engineering learners to speak with confidence, turning them into successful engineers. Reduced level of speech anxiety will definitely increase work productivity of any individual. Universities could make public speaking as one of the must attend course before their engineering learners can graduate. Having to attend and participate regularly in public speaking classes is one of the best ways to train our undergraduates to speak effectively. Therefore, the present study focusses to answer the following research questions.

- a. Do engineering learners experience English language speech anxiety?
- b. Is there a relationship between the engineering learners' speech anxiety level and their English language proficiency level?
- c. What are the causes of English language speech anxiety among the engineering learners?

2. Literature Review

There are many occasions when people become tongue-tied when asked to give a public speech. Studies after studies have shown that there is an aspect of communication about which many people admit feeling apprehensive when engaged in public speaking (Bodie, 2010). An earlier study revealed that public speaking and speaking in a class or meeting were the top two greatest fears in social situations (Ruscio et al., 2008). On what entails public speaking anxiety or glossophobia, many researchers have somehow agreed that it is interrelated with communication apprehension. McCroskey (1984) proposed that people become fearful of speaking in public when it is an activity involving communication with others. Wrench, Brogan, McCroskey and Jowi (2008) came to the same conclusion about public speaking anxiety in that an individual tend to have obstructions when he/she imagines to be communicating with one or more people. McCroskey (2001) further explained that communication apprehension is created as a result of influences generated by audience, time and context and this is called situational anxiety. Another definition of speech anxiety is "the nervousness that a speaker feels before and/or during a presentation" (Learning, 2017).

According to Liu (2011), public speaking is a speaking activity which serves to inform, influence or to entertain a group of people. In spite of the acknowledged importance of effective public speaking, Liu (ibid.) maintained that a lot of people, including tertiary students, have glossophobia or the fear to speak in public. Public speaking has never been an easy task as it induces apprehension or nervousness even in the most experienced public speakers. Floyd (2017) stressed that 91% of American adults think that their communication skills are above average and that they have the idea of being effective communicators when in actual fact they are not.

In a study involving Turkish students studying English at the Turkish State University, Cagatay (2015) found out that it was the belief of the students that speaking skills invoked the most fear in them. Occhipinti (2009) explained non-English speaking employees were fearful speaking in public as they did not feel confident of themselves, overwhelmed with feelings of insecurity and anxiety. The study further exposed that Arab college students lacking public speaking experiences would experience similar fear if not more, as they needed to their Arab language to the English language. The same scenario was discovered among the Omani students where their speaking fear was due to the lack of English proficiency and the fact that the students' failure to improve in the English language (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012). Del Villar (2010) concluded that even with the English language being a second language and a medium of educational instruction at all levels

in the Philippines, it is common to find Filipinos still experience certain level of speaking anxiety. Mak (2011) in a study involving Chinese students stressed that these students experienced high level of communication anxiety when they had to speak English in front of the class without being given the chance of early preparation and this has been pointed out to the fact that they were used to their first language.

Nazir, Bashir, and Raja (2014) stated that most of the Pakistani learners are seen highly apprehensive in communicating in the English language in the classroom. Dhar & Khan (2014) discovered that teachers in Pakistan politicized their students based on their ethnicity and social status, which causes the students to experience a high level of communication anxiety.

Marinho et al. (2015) discovered 63.9% of the college students actually feared of public speaking. A large number of the students (89.3%) expressed preference of having classes that could improve their public speaking skills. This is a noble suggestion as the skills learned in a public speaking course can help students stand out during a job interview and at their place of employment (Mohammadi & Swift, 2013; Myers, 2015).

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

The present study used quantitative research design which employed survey methodology. This study is mainly about exploring the level of speech anxiety of UTeM engineering students, the causes of speech anxiety among students and if the anxiety has any relationship with their English language proficiency. With these research questions to answer, it is best that a survey research is adopted.

3.2 Sampling

The participants for the current study were from the researcher's English for Effective Communication (EEC) class, who were all in their third semester of Diploma studies pursuing Electronics and Mechanical Engineering programmes. The total number of the students in this EEC class was 65 and all of them were taken in as respondents in this survey research. EEC is a compulsory subject for all Engineering diploma students and the subject focuses on speaking skills mainly. With the diploma students in the EEC class all selected to be the respondents, hence it is more of purposive sampling for this study.

3.3 Research Instrument

The instrument used in the present study to collect data is Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) questionnaire. This PRPSA questionnaire, originally developed by McCroskey (1970) consists of 34 items. These items which highlight attitude, psychology and feeling aspects, measure the fear of public speaking. Each item is rated on a 5-item Likert scale ranging 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Twenty-two items express a negative opinion e.g., "I feel anxious while waiting to give my speech", while 12 items have positive expressions e.g., "I enjoy preparing for a speech." In the analysis of these data, the positively formulated items of PRPSA were reversed so that high scores on the scale consistently reflected higher fear of public speaking. All the items have excellent internal consistency (0.94) and good test-retest reliability (0.84) (Mortberg et al., 2018).

The severity of the public speaking anxiety is categorised in PRPSA under 3 levels where scores above 131 indicate high anxiety, scores between 98 and 131 indicate moderate anxiety while scores below 98 indicate low anxiety.

The questionnaire has two sections. Section A requires the participants to fill in their programme of study and the grade achieved in their SPM English language paper whereas Section B consists of the items which assess the attitude, psychology and feelings associated with giving a public speech. Table 1 lists the number of items which fall under the positive and negative expressions.

Table 1. Types of PRPSA items

	Item No.	Total item
Positive expressions	4,6,7,8,11,12 15,16,17,18 24,26	12
Negative expressions	1,2,3,5,9,10,1 314,19,20,21, 2223,25,27,2 8,2930,31,32, 33,34	22
	Total	34

The participants' achievements in their English language paper at SPM level were taken as the measure of their English language proficiency. The SPM examination is conducted at the end of the students' secondary school studies. As the participants in this research have just left school, the results of their English language paper would be the latest indicator of their English language proficiency level.

3.4 Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed to the participants during their class hours. They were briefed on the purpose of responding to the 34 PRPSA statements. They were asked to answer the survey without fear or favour and were assured of the confidentiality of the information given. The questionnaires were completed without any personal identification (except gender and programme code) to ensure anonymity and increase the probability of honest response.

3.5 Data analysis

The responses from the questionnaires, which formed the main source of data were analysed using SPSS version 24.0. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to interpret the generated data. Mean scores were used to explain the public speaking anxiety level of the participants while Pearson Coefficient Correlation test explained the relationship between the participants' level of public speaking anxiety and their English language grades.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 2 shows the 65 participants come from two different programme of studies. 35 (54%) participants study for Diploma of Electronics Engineering (DEN) while the other 30 (46%) pursue Diploma of Mechanical Engineering (DMC). As for language proficiency, Table 3 provides details on the participants' English language grades at SPM level. From their SPM English language grades, it is concluded that 50 (76.9%) students are proficient in the language. Only 7 (10.8%) participants passed with different levels of C grades while 8 (12.3%) failed their English language paper.

Table 2. Demographic profile of participants

Programme	Frequency (f) N = 65	Percent (%)
DEN	35	54 %
DMC	30	46 %

Table 3. SPM English language achievement in terms of grade

Grade	Mastery level	Frequency (f) N = 65	Percent (%)
A+	Excellent	2	3.1
A	Very good	20	30.8
A-	Good	11	16.9
B+	Pass with credit	11	16.9
B	Pass with credit	6	9.2
B-	Pass with credit	0	0
C+	Pass	4	6.2
C	Pass	3	4.6
C-	Pass	0	0
D	Failure	8	12.3

4.1 Level of English language speech anxiety of UTeM Engineering Diploma students

Discovering the students' level of English language speech anxiety can help reveal answer to the following research question.

Research Q1: Do technical learners experience speech anxiety?

Table 4. Participants' level of PRPSA

Level	N	Mean
High	8	136
Moderate	33	112.3
Low	24	86.7

The table above shows the mean score distribution. It can be seen that half of the total number of participants i.e 33 (50.8%) participants suffer from a moderate level public speaking anxiety (M=112.3). Only 8 (12.3%) participants suffer from a high level speech anxiety (M=136). The number of participants with a low level speech anxiety (M=86.7) is 24 (37%). The mean score for overall PRPSA of the diploma engineering is 111.6 which is of moderate level. This goes to show that UTeM diploma engineering students experience anxiety and uneasiness when they are asked to present their speech in the English language.

4.2 Relationship between PRPSA and English language proficiency level

In determining if there is any relationship between the participants' public speaking anxiety and their English language proficiency levels, the answer is to be provided by the next research question.

Research Q2: Is there a relationship between the technical learners' speech anxiety level and their English language proficiency level?

Table 5. Correlations between PRPSA level and English language proficiency level (N = 65)

		SPM English language grades
PRPSA	Pearson Correlation	-0.149
	P-value	0.235
	N	65

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows the correlations between the speech anxiety level and the level of the English proficiency of the participants. The results indicate that the Pearson’s correlation coefficient is -0.149, while the P-value of two-tailed test of significance is 0.235. With $r=-0.149$, it explains that the participants’ PRPSA level has a negative weak correlation with their SPM English language grades. It is also noted that the P-value of 0.235 is statistically not significant as $p>0.05$ which does not satisfy the common cut-off for statistical significance of $P < 0.05$.

4.3 Causes of public speaking anxiety

It does not suffice to acknowledge the participants’ suffering of speech anxiety without establishing the factors that cause the fear to speak among the engineering learners. Therefore, the final research question for this study will reveal the answer.

Research Q3: What are the causes of English language speech anxiety among the engineering learners?

Table 6. Descriptive analysis of PRPSA items

NO	ITEM	STRONGLY DISAGREE (1)	DISAGREE (2)	NUETRAL (3)	AGREE (4)	STRONGLY AGREE (5)
1	While preparing for giving a speech, I feel tense and nervous.	0.00%	9.23%	23.08%	41.54%	26.15%
2	I feel tense when I see the words “speech” and “public speech” on a course outline when studying.	1.54%	16.92%	29.23%	40.00%	12.31%
3	My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.	0.00%	16.92%	30.77%	40.00%	12.31%
4	Right after giving a speech I feel that I have had a pleasant experience.	0.00%	4.62%	15.38%	38.46%	41.54%
5	I get anxious when I think about a speech coming up.	1.54%	9.23%	15.38%	60.00%	13.85%
6	I have no fear of giving a speech.	18.46%	43.08%	24.62%	10.77%	3.08%
7	Although I am nervous just before starting a speech, I soon settle down after starting and feel calm and comfortable.	0.00%	10.77%	20.00%	41.54%	27.69%

NO	ITEM	STRONGLY DISAGREE (1)	DISAGREE (2)	NUETRAL (3)	AGREE (4)	STRONGLY AGREE (5)
8	I look forward to giving a speech.	7.69%	16.92%	40.00%	30.77%	4.62%
9	When the instructor announces a speaking assignment in class, I can feel myself getting tense.	0.00%	20.00%	32.31%	40.00%	7.69%
10	My hands tremble when I am giving a speech.	12.31%	26.15%	33.85%	24.62%	3.08%
11	I feel relaxed while giving a speech.	7.69%	43.08%	40.00%	6.15%	3.08%
12	I enjoy preparing for a speech.	1.54%	27.69%	47.69%	20.00%	3.08%
13	I am in constant fear of forgetting what I prepared to say.	1.54%	21.54%	35.38%	32.31%	9.23%
14	I get anxious if someone asks me something about my topic that I don't know.	0.00%	9.23%	20.00%	53.85%	16.92%
15	I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.	0.00%	20.00%	46.15%	27.69%	6.15%
16	I feel that I am in complete possession of myself while giving a speech.	3.08%	23.08%	41.54%	29.23%	3.08%
17	My mind is clear when giving a speech.	3.08%	35.38%	44.62%	16.92%	0.00%
18	I do not dread giving a speech.	10.77%	27.69%	41.54%	18.46%	1.54%
19	I perspire just before starting a speech.	12.31%	33.85%	32.31%	16.92%	4.62%
20	My heart beats very fast just as I start a speech.	4.62%	18.46%	29.23%	38.46%	9.23%
21	I experience considerable anxiety while sitting in the room just before my speech starts.	0.00%	13.85%	38.46%	41.54%	6.15%
22	Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.	3.08%	26.15%	30.77%	38.46%	1.54%
23	Realizing that only a little time remains in a speech makes me very tense and anxious.	4.62%	21.54%	21.54%	41.54%	10.77%
24	While giving a speech, I know I can control my feelings of tension and stress.	7.69%	9.23%	33.85%	36.92%	12.31%
25	I breathe faster just before starting a speech.	9.23%	29.23%	36.92%	23.08%	1.54%

NO	ITEM	STRONGLY DISAGREE (1)	DISAGREE (2)	NUETRAL (3)	AGREE (4)	STRONGLY AGREE (5)
26	I feel comfortable and relaxed in the hour or so just before giving a speech.	7.69%	41.54%	33.85%	15.38%	1.54%
27	I do poorer on speeches because I am anxious.	10.77%	16.92%	20.00%	36.92%	15.38%
28	I feel anxious when the teacher announces the date of a speaking assignment.	4.62%	26.15%	36.92%	26.15%	6.15%
29	When I make a mistake while giving a speech, I find it hard to concentrate on the parts that follow.	6.15%	21.54%	29.23%	32.31%	10.77%
30	During an important speech I experience a feeling of helplessness building up inside me.	3.08%	33.85%	35.38%	24.62%	3.08%
31	I have trouble falling asleep the night before a speech.	26.15%	44.62%	24.62%	3.08%	1.54%
32	My heart beats very fast while I present a speech.	7.69%	23.08%	32.31%	27.69%	9.23%
33	I feel anxious while waiting to give my speech.	0.00%	9.23%	38.46%	38.46%	13.85%
34	While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.	7.69%	23.08%	33.85%	30.77%	4.62%

Table 6 reveals the factors causing speech anxiety among the engineering learners at UTem. The mere thoughts of speaking publicly seemed to be one of the main causes of glossophobia among these technical learners where 60% of the respondents agreed and 13.85% strongly agreed to the statement “I get anxious when I think about a speech coming up”. All in all, 73.85% of the respondents admitted feeling the fear of speaking in public. This scenario is similar to a study undertaken by Sikandar (2017) who elucidated that the main cause of speech anxiety in the students is due to the fear of speaking in front of others as 75% students in that study admitted fearing of public speaking.

Another statement, “I get anxious if someone asks me something about my topic that I don’t know” had 70.77% of the respondents (53.85% agree and 16.92% strongly agree) proving that they indeed felt uneasy about public speaking.

67.69% of the respondents (41.54% agree and 26.15% strongly agree) admitted of feeling tense and nervous while preparing to give a speech. The respondents were found to feel anxious when they see the words “speech” and “public speech” on a course outline when studying which shows in their accumulated responses of 52.31% (40% agree and 12.31% strongly agree). This public speaking anxiety is further indicated when 52.31% (40% agree and 12.31% strongly agree) of the respondents again maintained that their thoughts become confused and jumbled when they are giving a speech. Ironically the same number of respondents (52.31%) stated of feeling anxious while waiting to give their speech. The next cause of public speaking anxiety as pointed out by the respondents (52.31%) is that they felt very tense and anxious when they realized that only a little time remained in a speech. It is also discovered that the respondents (52.30%) viewed that they do poorer on speeches due to their anxiety. It is pertinent to note that 50.77% of the respondents did not feel relaxed while giving a speech. The respondents (47.69%) further proved of their public speaking anxiety by admitting getting tensed when the instructor announces a speaking assignment in class and 41.54% of the respondents were in constant fear of forgetting what they prepared to say. Signs of speech anxiety were displayed when the respondents (47.69%) experienced fast heart beats as they start their speech and 40% of them agreed to the statement “certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech”.

Concentration on the speaking task is jeopardized when the respondents (43.08%) agreed to the statement “When I make a mistake while giving a speech, I find it hard to concentrate on the parts that follow”. Similar feedbacks were also found in a study conducted by Sulastiani (2020) when the respondents revealed that they felt uncomfortable speaking English in their public speaking class and that their public speaking anxiety caused them to fare poorly in public speaking activities, such as forgetting their speech, feeling confused, resulting in disarrays in their speech preparation and break offs in speeches.

5. Conclusion

Sugiati and Indriani (2021) strongly recommended that students’ level of speech anxiety in public speaking need to be measured as knowing the degree of anxiety in the students and its causes would help in overcoming students' public speaking anxiety. In an earlier study, Mohamad Sattar et al. (2014) identified some of the challenges students face when they were asked to speak English before a crowd. When required to speak in public, students are mostly affected by their low self-confidence, lack of constant speaking experience, lack of knowledge in public speaking, fear of making mistakes and being laughed at, inadequate preparation and timidity. Kankam and Boateng (2017) found that fear of negative evaluation drives up the apprehensive feelings of the students especially when they are tasked to speak up in the classroom. This undoubtedly sheds light on why students are not able to perform academically professionally. Pratama (2018) too agreed that public speaking being a barrier in the academic process, students cannot actively share their ideas and opinions loudly due to factors such as fear of making mistakes, negative evaluation, and minimum preparation. Findings in a study by Wan Noor Farah et al. (2021) indicated that the anxiety exhibited by the students originated from their fear of being required to speak in English rather than being asked to speak in public. The existence of fear in speaking English has indeed deprived the students the joy and willingness to speak in the English language. It has been suggested that the size of the audience seems to be a concern when students are presenting. Hence it is not surprising that most students who suffer from speech anxiety try to avoid public speaking as much as possible (Tiyas et al., 2020).

Public speaking anxiety or glossophobia certainly affects our undergraduates’ chances of getting employed in organizations which place communication skills as their top priority. Mohamad Sattar (2014) reaffirmed that it is essential for graduates to possess employability skills if they intend to compete in the global market. This is necessary as employability skills have been given great priority by the manufacturing industries. He strongly claimed that employees with good communication skills will be able to convey ideas effectively which is inevitably beneficial to the daily operation running. Chan and Selvam (2016) also insisted that Engineering programmes must ensure that graduates are able to communicate effectively. They further contended that universities are giving utmost importance for students to grasp science and technology concepts, but not giving due attention to other subjects which help in building up the graduate employability skills.

Ramstad (2018) is of the opinion that although public speaking is one of the top fears for many individuals, it is advantageous for the students to take public speaking courses offered at colleges. It has been proven that students who have taken public speaking classes perform better in other courses, become better listeners, learn to manage anxiety, and build their self-confidence (Bodie, 2010; Massengale, 2014). Numerous studies show that college graduates who were required to take a public speaking course are 48% more likely to speak at a meeting and 38% more likely to give a presentation compared to 22% and 19% for high-school graduates (Hancock, Stone, Brundage, & Zeigler, 2008). Due to the fact that public speaking is one of the most desired skills for employers, findings from some studies have confirmed that the skills learned in a public speaking course can help students stand out during a job interview and at their place of employment (Mohammadi & Swift, 2013; Myers, 2015). Dansieh (2021) investigated the causes of glossophobia in tertiary students and proposed that lecturers should organise seminars on public speaking skills and encourage regular individual oral presentation in class in order for the students to develop positive attitudes towards public speaking. He went on to suggest that lecturers adopt an interactive approach which has elements of positivity in helping students overcome their phobia for public speaking.

However, this study has few limitations. The first limitation is the study only involved engineering students who are studying at diploma level. The cohorts are from electronics and mechanical programmes. Future studies on technical learners may want to cover other branch of engineering studies e.g. manufacturing, electrical, civil etc. There is a need to check on the public speaking anxiety level on students who are pursuing

Bachelor degree in technical studies too. Another limitation is that number of participants is very small in order to generalise the conclusion on the whole population of diploma engineering learners. A mixed method which consists of both quantitative and qualitative methods will give a much better insight on the effects of speech anxiety on the engineering learners.

In conclusion, it is material that tertiary institutions take steps to enhance their undergraduates' public speaking skills to reap the benefits it offers especially when these students graduate and join the workforce. Public speaking anxiety is very common in individuals and the only way to reduce the phobia of speaking in front of a group of people is to give oneself the opportunity for more public speaking experiences. Running public speaking programmes regularly in campuses and including public speaking elements in the engineering curriculum particularly are indispensable if we are to hone the speaking skills of our young engineers. Eliminating glossophobia in the engineering learners should be a matter of concern for all. This is a prudent way how tertiary institutions can help young graduates to be employable, and once employed ultimately working their way up to better positions in their chosen fields.

The task to write out the paper was divided among the three authors whereby Subatira wrote the Abstract, Introduction and Results & Discussion, while Nurlisa undertook Literature review and Linda Khoo contributed the Methodology & Conclusion sections.

6. Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank their research groups, Research and Innovation Management Advancement (RIMA) & Strategic & Innovative Resources for Human Development (SIR-HD) and Sustainable Industrial Community (S-iCOMM) for their unwavering support for the conduct of this study. Deep appreciation also goes to the top management of Pusat Pembelajaran Bahasa, UTeM for their strong motivation and encouragement given throughout this research.

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