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THE ROLE OF GENDER IN INFLUENCING PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigates the role of gender in influencing public speaking anxiety. Questionnaire survey was administered to the samples of the study. Technique of correlation and descriptive analysis will be further applied to the data collected to determine the relationship between gender and public speaking anxiety. This study could serve as a guide to identify the effects of gender differences on public speaking anxiety and provide necessary advice on how to design a way of coping with or overcoming public speaking anxiety.*

KEYWORDS: gender, speaking anxiety, English Language competence, communication, across culture.

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is a state of uncomfortable emotion where danger is perceived, and the victim has a powerless feeling with the expression of tension in anticipation of danger. In the classification of anxiety, Scovel (1978) refer to 'trait anxiety' as a rapid permanent behavior or feeling to be anxious and this is considered to be part of personality. Spielberger (1983) refers to the second classification as 'state anxiety' which is explained to be apprehension encountered by the victim at a specific time period as a stimulus to a situation which is definite. Ellis (1994) refers to the third classification as 'situation-specific anxiety' which is associated with apprehension that stands out for particular phenomenon and situations. Gardner and MacIntyre (1994) explain the idea behind apprehension experienced as often related to a particular situation where the second language in which the speaker is not fully competent is to be used in public speaking.

For some years now researches have been directed towards public speaking anxiety. Public speaking anxiety is usually associated with fear among different categories of people in any society (Gibson, Gruner, Hanna, Smythe& Hayes, 1980). In addition, "public speaking anxiety represents a cluster of evaluative feelings about speech making" (Daly, Vangelisti, Neel, & Cavanaugh, 1989, p. 40) in which case speakers who are very anxious do not experience positive feelings related to the context of public speaking. For several years back, researchers in communication have tried to examine the explanation encompassing the psychological and physiological parts of public speaking anxiety in order to proffer considerable remedy that may lessen the adverse influence of anxiety for public speakers.

Speaking before a group or public has been a long standing issue in the communication and language arena. Students tried to avoid speaking in public because of embarrassment, shaky voices, rapid heartbeat, feel discomfort, inferiority complex and low self-respect (Behnke et al., 1978; Clements & Turpin, 1996). According to Krannich (2004) delivering speech, presentations in class and before public have been an important dilemma faced by students. Some researchers regard it as something peculiar to audience and public speaking context (Beatty et al., 1978), if possible shielding pubic communication (McCroskey& Beatty, 1984); its consequence may vary across several processes or phases of speech preparation, delivery, and completion (Behnke & Sawyer, 2001).

Public speaking anxiety is a dilemma faced by the populace, but students in particular. McCroskey (1977) reported that invariably twenty percent of students are faced with public speaking anxiety. To elucidate further, he documented that an individual level of fear of anxiety is correlated with either real or proposed communication with another individual or persons.Other likely factor affecting the public speaking anxiety on oral presentation, group discussion or proposal defense is gender differences. Gender differences will be one area of focus in this study as there is likelihood that it is not clearly true that gender differences constitute to the level of public speaking anxiety.

Gender And Its Influencing In Public Speaking Anxiety

The significance role of gender in the control of speaking anxiety has remained the most controversial as far as previous studies that have beamed their research light in this direction is concerned. Intrarapraset (2000) pinpoint that there is a linear relationship between gender and speaking anxiety. To elucidate more, Behnke and Sawyer (2001) documented that female displayed higher anxiety based on Gender- based study. In contrast, Matsuda and Gobel (2004); and Wang (2010) found out that gender does not have a significant effect on the overall anxiety, while Levitt (1980) in his study stated that male students felt a higher level of anxiety when they perceive their spoken anxiety than that of others, whereas such relationship was not observed among the females. Mejias et al. (1991) discovered in their own study that females are more prone to speaking anxiety than males.

In the same pursuit, Ayu Rita & Nadhia Dalila (2008) in their study on anxiety and speaking English as a second language among male and female Business studies students in Universiti Industri, Selangor; an attempt to identify the potential sources and causes of anxiety as related to the students' affective needs and their needs in higher institutions of learning posed a research question that asked if gender differences have an impact towards the level of anxiety of students in UNISEL, and was answered with a qualitative research approach, through open-ended interview and content analysis of newspaper, magazine and journal reports. The results showed that female students experienced more anxiety than male students while speaking in class. Female students were more anxious than male students when expected to speak in English language which is a foreign language to them; both genders experienced nervousness and panic when asked to speak publicly without being pre-informed and both never felt sure of themselves when asked to speak in class. Female students exercise lower self-confidence because of their interest in the friends who might be judging them, and male students are found to be experiencing less anxiety when it comes to volunteering answers in class. On the overall findings, it was concluded that female students are more anxious when compared to their male counter parts.

The effect of gender in the experience of speaking anxiety has been seen to be gender differences in the anxiety experience, taking subjects form ten different Arab culturally subjective; stressing the fact that the cultural background of the speaker determines the dispositional characters in the control of speaking anxiety. In stating the significant role played by culture in public speaking encounter, Toth, (2011) stated that cultural differences

encompasses gender, socio economic status, and ethnicity, with an illustrating example of a certain culture where the voices of their women are not valued. Meaning that female student form such cultural background will not be comfortable while engaging in public speaking, most pathetically when she has been told that her views about issues are naturally subliminal, and of no worth or value, thus contribute to her experience of speaking anxiety.

Yiamsawat, (2004) in their study to investigate the effect of countries consisting of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Emirates, Oman, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Iraq reported that females had a higher mean anxiety score more than their male counterparts across the ten countries, with a well-felt difference in 7 out of the 10 sampling population. In this respect, the cause of the gender difference was traced to the effect of gender roles and sex-typing in their socialization process; showing that while female college students in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Emirates, Oman, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon have their anxiety significantly higher than the male counterparts, females in Palestine, Jordan and Iraq showed no significant gender difference, and thus concluded that the prediction of the study that gender influences the experience of public speaking anxiety is aligning and consistent with many of the other previous studies.

From a perception of health disorderliness, however in relationship with anxiety, Neuman, (2007). in a study to investigate if gender differences is linked to anxiety and its association across culture, reported that women are found to be of higher anxiety levels than men, with a consistent and uniform results across respondents studied from Australia, South Korea, Japan, England, and the United States, thus stating that socio-demographic variables do not interact in the relationship between gender and anxiety, and concluded that even across a variety of culture, women are found to be of higher anxiety than men; a relationship that is unconnected with age, education level, and marital status.

Mohammadi, (2013) in a work centered on investigating the effect of gender in foreign language anxiety among the Iranians related that among the affective variables that are related to language learning, especially the experience of anxiety in foreign language learning, gender, either being experimented in a matched-gender and mixed gender classrooms as the study suggested, and the study of its relationship with speaking anxiety. That study conducted among 96 respondents, all of whom were Iranians found out that mixed-gender classrooms are considered anxiety-provoking because of the presence of the opposite gender. It was discovered to be significantly responsible for the amount of the language anxiety experience among the Iranian learners.

In the same vein, Kumar, (2011) studied the relationship between gender and the foreign language classroom anxiety among the Iranian students, and having acknowledged the multiple nature of the foreign language anxiety, insinuated a prediction that gender plays a significant role in the classroom experience of foreign language learning, and subsequently reported that Iranian female are of higher anxiety than their male counterparts, therefore concluded that gender played a significant role in the experience of classroom anxiety, though contradicting Meihua and Jackson (2008) which reported that foreign language anxiety is positively related with both male and female students. Tianjian (2010) using a sample of first –year non-English majors at Guizhou College of finance and Economics in China as participants, found that speaking anxiety does not have any significant influence with gender but rather depend on the level of groups. These conflicting findings as regards the influence of gender in the experience of speaking anxiety necessitate this study's interest in that direction, most especially with respect to postgraduate English language students, whose level of English language exposure is expected to be gender balanced.

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive provides the summary of statistics such as the minimum and maximum values, mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis in relation to each of the variable. This information is provided in the result's table 4.6 below.

RESULT OF DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

						Skewness		Kurtosis	
	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std.D	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Gender	108	1	2	1.37	0.49	0.54	0.23	- 1.74	0.46
Age	108	1	4	2.05	0.73	0.67	0.23	0.82	0.46
Total English Lang. Competence	108	19.0	38.0	28.60	4.62	- 0.55	0.23	1.14	0.46
Total Speaking Anxiety	108	27.0	63.0	55.47	10.58	- 1.77	0.33	1.87	0.46
Valid (listwise)	108								

From the above table, gender consists of male (1) and female (2). Since gender is a discrete variable their means, standard deviation etc may not be all that important (Silvina Montrul, 2012). Age group range from "below 25 years" represented by 1 as the minimum and from 45-54 years as the maximum represented by 4. Their mean and standard deviation are respectively 2.05 and 0.73. The standard deviation indicates the amount by which measurement in a set varies from the average for the set. The respective skewness is positive implying that scores cluster to the left hand side of the graph at low values and the kurtosis for age indicates positive sign implying that the distribution demonstrate to be peaked, clustered at the center and have long thin tails. The associated standard error determines how accurate the measurement is in an estimate. Low standard error is preferable to high one.

The items for English language competence are 10 in number. The scores for each variable range from 1 to 5 representing "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" The total scores for each respondents on all the 10 items added together are represented under the variable named as "Total English language competence (TELC)". This variable, Total English language has the minimum and maximum scores equal to19.0 and 38.0 respectively among the whole respondents. Also, the mean or average scores for all the respondents are calculated and divided by the number of respondents to get the average or mean scores for the whole students. The standard deviation indicates the amount by which measurement in a set varies from the average for the set. Thus the mean scores for the whole students on the 10 items of English language competence and the standard deviation are 28.60 and 4.62 respectively. The value of skewness provides an indication of the symmetry of the distribution of scores on the graph while kortosis gives information about the "peakness" of the distribution of scores on the chart or graph. According to Silvina Montrul, (2012), positive skewness values shows that scores clusters at the low values, to the left hand side of the graph while the negative value of skewness indicate that scores cluster at the high end of right hand side of the graph. With regards to kurtosis, positive kurtosis indicate that the distribution of scores is peaked, (cluster at center) with thin long tails. Negative value of kurtosis indicates a distribution that is flat. From the result table, the value of skewness turned out to be negative (-0.55) indicating that the scores are clustered at the high end, to the right of the graph. The value of kurtosis for total English language competence indicates positive sign implying that the distribution demonstrate to be peaked, clustered at the center and have long thin tails. It is observed that the value of standard error was 0.23 and 0.46 for the skewness and kurtosis respectively.

The items for speaking anxiety are 15 in number. The scores for each variable range from 1 to 5 representing "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" The total scores for each respondents on all the 15 items added together are represented under the variable named as "Total Speaking Anxiety (TSA)". This variable, Total Speaking Anxiety has the minimum and maximum scores equal to27.0 and 63.0 respectively among the whole respondents. Also, the mean or average scores for all the respondents are calculated and divided by the number of respondents to get the average or mean scores for the whole students. The standard deviation indicates the amount by which measurement in a set varies from the average for the set. Thus the mean scores for the whole students on the 15 items of "Total Speaking Anxiety" and the standard deviation are 55.47 and 10.58 respectively. The value of skewness for "Total Speaking Anxiety" turned out to be negative (-1.77). According to Silvina Montrul, (2012), this indicates that the scores are clustered to the right of the graph, at the high end. The kurtosis for "Total Speaking Anxiety" also indicates positive sign implying that the distribution of scores for the variable "Total Speaking Anxiety" demonstrate to be peaked, and the scores are clustered at the center showing thin long tails. The value of standard error was 0.33 and 0.46 for the skewness and kurtosis respectively.

Correlation between Gender and Public Speaking Anxiety

In order to investigate the effects of gender differences among the students on the public speaking anxiety, this study undertakes correlation between the variables. The table 4.7 below presents the results of such relationship between the gender and public speaking anxiety.

Correlation Result between Gender and Speaking Anxiety

Dependent Variable		Independent variable
Total Speaking Anxiety		Gender
	Pearson Correlation	0.131
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.176
	No of Respondents	108

From the table above, the value of Pearson correlation is positive which implies that the total speaking anxiety as dependent variable move in the same direction with gender (dependent variable). The value of Pearson correlation is also shown to be 0.13 implying that there is small correlation between the two variables. In addition, the results indicate that r = 0.13, n=108, p> 0.05. Since, p=0.18 in the result is greater than 0.05% it means that gender has no significant impact on the total speaking anxiety. In order word, there is no correlation between the two variables. Therefore, the hypothesis that gender differences have significant effect on public speaking anxiety is rejected.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Correlation is undertaken to verify the research question of "What are the effects of gender differences among the students on the public speaking anxiety?" Findings reveal that though gender has positive relationship with the public speaking anxiety among the study, however, no significant impact of gender on public speaking anxiety is found. This implies that being male or female has not constituted to student having anxiety in speaking. This results support that of Matsuda and Gobel (2004) who found that gender does not have a significant effect on the overall anxiety. The likely reason for the non-significant effect of gender on speaking anxiety may be associated to the uneven distribution of the number of female and male

represented in the sample. For example, the number of female sample was just 40 compare to male sample of 68 in the current study. Previous studies which have obtained similar results as that of the current study include Matsuda and Gobel (2004); and Wang (2010). These studies found that there was no significant difference in the speaking anxiety with respect to gender. However, the result of the current study contradict those obtained by Behnke and Sawyer (2009); Fakhri (2012); Intrarapraset (2000); McCroskey, Gudykunst, and Nishida (1985); Mejias et al. (1991); and Tasee (2009).These latter studies obtained significant relationship between the two variables.

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