Emotions and Presentation Skills Development in English Language Teacher Training

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Abstract

This research-in-progress investigates the interplay between negative emotions and the development of presentation skills in English language teacher education. As future educators, English pre-service teachers often face anxiety, self-doubt, and stress, which can hinder their ability to effectively present and engage with students. This research aims to identify the primary negative emotions experienced by pre-service teachers in order to employ strategies for managing these emotions, foster resilience, and enhance presentation competencies.

The ongoing research has recognized the initial emotions of pre-service teachers in a course aimed at improving presentation skills. Observations of lessons and discussions with students are gradually uncovering their needs regarding coping mechanisms and emotional management techniques to improve both their presentation skills and overall well-being.

Ultimately, this research contributes to creating a more supportive and effective learning environment for both educators and students.

Keywords: Emotion, Well-being, Presentation Skills, Teacher Training

1 Introduction

The meeting with 19-year-old students in their first year of English language and literature pre-service teacher studies was unexpectedly full of contradictions regarding their abilities and willingness to perform oral presentations in class. Given that the students had chosen a programme where they would constantly be in the spotlight, we assumed that anxiety—and, in many cases, resistance to performing orally in class—would not be a significant issue.

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In the following chapters, we will explore various studies that show how public speaking, or simply presenting in front of classmates, is often associated with feelings of anxiety. Unfortunately, students often use the term 'anxiety' carelessly when describing their attitudes toward public speaking or in-class presentations. In our personal experience, students tend to blame low scores on their presentations on anxiety related to public speaking. Therefore, we decided to ask more questions and, in the first place, find out the student's emotions to navigate the course to improve their public speaking skills in the right direction.

We used The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) to determine students' emotional state during the lesson. The STAI is often used to distinguish between normal anxiety displays and depressive syndromes (Spielberg, 1989; Greene et al., 2017). Furthermore, coming from different educational backgrounds, having various levels of emotional experience, and encountering the pandemic through their teenage studies, more variables will impact public speaking skills. However, in our research in progress, or more specifically, pilot study, we will present the results of a small sample regarding their state anxiety levels, i.e., anxiety triggered by a temporary situation.

Presentation skills are a critical component of teacher education and developing these skills depends on numerous internal and external factors (Dong & Xu, 2022). We consider internal factors to be an individual's emotions, language skills, and personality traits. On the contrary, external factors may include classroom relationships, professional and individual preparation, cultural influence, and experience during the pandemic. Moreover, generational characteristics can be seen as lying on a thin line between internal and external factors that influence pre-service teachers' ability to deliver presentations and perform effectively in front of an audience.

This paper will review how various factors influence presentation and public speaking skills. Based on the pilot study, we will present the results of the STAI questionnaire regarding state anxiety, explain the limitations of the pilot study, and propose recommendations for follow-up research.

2   Generation Z in contradictions

Generation Z is the generation we are working within the lessons and preparing for their professional lives. Also, commonly referred to as Gen Z, is the demographic cohort born between the late 1990s and early 2010s, and they are the first generation to have grown up with the ubiquity of digital technology (Alruthaya et al., 2021). Before the pandemic, Gen Z individuals were known for their strong verbal and non-verbal communication skills due to their extensive engagement in various digital platforms and social media (Anwar,2019). However, the prolonged isolation and social distancing measures implemented during the pandemic have significantly altered the communication patterns of Gen Z and, in some cases, hindered the development of speaking skills. With fewer in-person interactions and increased reliance on virtual communication, many individuals have experienced a decline in their ability

to engage in effective face-to-face conversations, read nonverbal cues, and adapt their communication style to different social contexts. Furthermore, the increased use of text-based communication platforms, such as messaging and social media, has led to a shift in the way Gen Z individuals express themselves, with a greater emphasis on informal written communication and a potential decline in their oral proficiency (Alruthaya et al., 2021).

Due to the strong preference for digital modes of communication and information-gathering, the preferences in learning styles have also gradually changed. One of the primary concerns regarding Gen Z's academic performance is their perceived deficiency in traditional communication and social skills. Communication skills are lessened, and active listening and collaboration are also lessened. This has significant implications in language learning contexts, where oral communication and interpersonal skills are essential in academic and later career environments (Janssen & Carradini, 2021, p. 137).

Even though technology competence plays a significant part in forming Gen Z, the cultural context also plays a role in shaping students' presentation skills. Students from Asia, for example, may be more inclined towards a formal, reserved presentation style (Alghamdi, 2021), whereas in European contexts, where English is widely taught as a foreign language, students may exhibit a more expressive and interactive approach. Furthermore, there may be differences in the confidence in delivering presentations due to language proficiency in so-called post-communist European countries (Kralova & Tirpakova, 2019).

However, a number of different studies from various areas agree that one of the fundamental difficulties faced by EFL students is the anxiety and nervousness associated with oral presentations. Students may feel self-conscious, struggle to organize thoughts, or experience a loss of confidence when delivering a presentation in a second language. More specifically, aspiring educators face anxiety, self-doubt, and stress, which can hinder their ability to effectively present and engage with students in their upcoming professional careers (Povedana-Brotons et al., 2024). Razawi et al. (2019) studied how personality traits, preparation, audience interest, and language ability affect student oral presentations. They concluded that all play an essential part as students come from different backgrounds, with different levels of self-esteem and self-confidence, and therefore, they should be treated in the classroom accordingly. They believe that the role of a lecturer is vital, and it is in their competence to accommodate the lessons to serve the students' individual needs.

Pre-service teachers have recognized the importance of emotional education in their initial training, acknowledging the need to develop their emotional competence and that of their future students. (Hernández-Amorós & Solano, 2017, p. 511) However, they have also reported that their university training has been sparse and too theoretical, leaving them underprepared to navigate the emotional complexities of the classroom. (Hernández-Amorós & Solano, 2017, p. 517).

Moreover, different approaches and methods have already been applied in different studies to see what eases students' anxiety levels, for example, by applying a multimodal approach (Zadorozhnyy & Lee, 2024). However, not just the technicalities and knowledge from an oral

presentation but the emotional intelligence and student speaking skills are correlated (Sulistyawati, 2018).

In the end, it all comes down to well-being, and therefore, we need to recognize negative emotions such as anxiety and act accordingly to be able to help students improve their presentation skills.

3   Pilot study

The goal of the pilot study was to assess students' feelings during lessons and evaluate their levels of state anxiety. We decided to use The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) to determine students' emotional state during the lesson. The STAI is a validated 40-item self-report assessment device that includes separate measures of state and trait anxiety (Spielberg, 1989; Greene et al., 2017). However, we used the form Y, consisting of 20 self-report items on a 4-point Likert scale with a range from 1- not at all to 4- very much so, determining only state anxiety, i.e., a temporary state influenced by the current situation (Spielberg, 1989).

Scoring is accomplished by summing scores for items. The total score ranges from 0 to 80, where STAI scores are classified as low anxiety (20-37), moderate anxiety (38-44), and high anxiety (45-80) (ibid.).

The pilot study's sample consisted of first-year bachelor students of the English language and literature teacher training programme who signed up for the course Presentation Skills during the summer semester of 2024. The course had 14 students, a mixed group of males and females aged 18-19. The participants were an availability-based sample.

The course, Presentation Skills, is a weekly seminar for bachelor students, preferably in their first year of study in the summer semester, i.e., from mid-February to mid-May. For full-time students, the total workload is 75 hours per semester, whereas in-class seminars comprise 25 hours. The learning outcomes of the course are to know the basic principles of presenting and creating presentations in English, create comprehensible and well-structured performances, and proactively manage and present the results of their work to the public. Besides practicing creating, managing, and presenting presentations, the course covers topics such as critical thinking while working with information and text, communication with the audience, and coping with anxiety. Students are supposed to deliver one individual and one group presentation within the semester.

The course lasted 12 weeks, and the STAI was completed in the fourth week of the course.

At the end of the course, the pilot study participants were asked for non-formal anonymous feedback on their feelings, course expectation fulfillment, or other needs.

3.1 Pilot study results

Out of 14 students, eight students scored an average of 41, which means that their anxiety levels are moderate. Three students scored 36, indicating low anxiety, and three students belong to the group with high anxiety levels with an average number of scores of 52.

Without follow-up questions, it is difficult to explain what could trigger high or even moderate anxiety levels. For instance, individual or group presentations, which were not scheduled for that particular lesson, could have been potential triggers.

Regarding non-formal feedback, students' answers at the end of the course were overwhelmingly positive. They described the lessons as creative, interesting, and inspirational, particularly when watching other examples of famous people's speeches. However, one area for improvement was the need for more time to practice their individual speeches.

As we mentioned, this course is taught in the first year of students' studies. Several feedbacks highlighted how they appreciated the opportunity to get to know each other through the introductory activities in every lesson. During this activity, students had to express opinions and discuss topics they had known and prepared for beforehand.

3.2 Limitations of the pilot study

The study's most significant limitations are the low number of participants and the need for more organization in distributing the STAI at the right time. However, the incentive to find out about students' emotional state came after talking to students about public speaking after the course had already started and after the word anxiety had been reoccurring in our discussion on the students' side. Moreover, it happened in the course mentioned above and other courses where they were supposed to present in front of the class.

Time played a crucial role, and it did not play in our favour. About three seminars were canceled because of various school-related events happening at the same time as the seminar was scheduled, and therefore, students had fewer opportunities to practice. Moreover, not all students were at all lessons due to their personal or health issues.

Moreover, for future research, we will substitute the condensed version of the 20-item STAI self-report with a 40-item self-report questionnaire in order to differentiate between state and trait anxiety by students in more detail.

We will take into consideration the gender of participants and compare state and trait anxiety levels at the beginning of the course and the end of the course.

Pilot studies are essential to the research process, providing researchers with valuable insights and opportunities to refine their methodologies before embarking on a full-scale investigation. They can help detect potential flaws in the study design, assess the appropriateness of the research instruments, and evaluate the effectiveness of the data collection procedures (Mocorro, 2017). Moreover, one key characteristic of pilot studies is

their emphasis on availability-based sampling, where the selection of participants is primarily driven by their accessibility and convenience (Andrade, 2020, p.102).

In spite of the limitations, we are now able to accommodate the research design, avoid issues that we encountered during the piloting, and continue with the research to achieve more representative outcomes.

4   Conclusion

In this paper, we briefly reviewed how different factors influence presentation and public speaking skills. We learned that even though the emotional state plays a crucial role, other factors, such as an individual's background, language skills, and opportunities to practice, go hand in hand with emotions. Additionally, the overall characteristics of Gen Z contribute to the student's performance regarding public speaking skills.

Although the pilot study results of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) are statistically insignificant, we plan to further explore the emotional state of the students in this context. We aim to gather a larger sample and use a 40-item self-administered questionnaire to assess state and trait anxiety separately.

In the follow-up study, we will back up the STAI results with context fitting around our sample, taking all the above-mentioned factors into consideration to chain the anxiety levels to the factors.

Hernández-Amorós and Solano (2017, p. 517) emphasized that students require more practice and emotional competence. This aligns with the feedback from students in our sample.

Therefore, we are committed to ensuring that students have sufficient time to practice, regardless of external factors or issues that may arise during the course. Similarly, we will ensure that students feel comfortable around each other, as feedback indicated that getting to know one another helped ease tension and allowed students to relax before giving their presentations.

We are confident that the follow-up research will yield valuable results that can serve as a foundation for improving similarly structured courses.

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