COMMON ERRORS IN ACADEMIC WRITING AMONG LEARNERS WHOSE FIRST LANGUAGE IS NOT ENGLISH: FREQUENCY, SOURCES AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Zarnigor Eshkuzieva
The English Teacher of Nordic International University
Gmail: eshqoziyeva.zarnigor@nordicuniversity.org
Telefon: +998904817295
ORCID: 0009-0008-5322-9681

Abstract. Academic presentations are among the most stressful tasks for EFL university students, and anxiety often prevents them from showing their real abilities. This study will explore the level and sources of presentation anxiety among EFL students at an international university in Uzbekistan and test a way to reduce it. In Phase 1, about 200 students will complete an adapted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, and the link between anxiety and presentation performance will be examined. In Phase 2, a semester-long presentation training programme, including gradual exposure, rehearsal, peer feedback and video self-reflection, will be tested with two classes. Changes in anxiety and performance will be measured, and journals and interviews will explore participants' experiences. The study aims to fill a gap in research on Central Asian learners and offer teachers a practical, evidence-based programme.

Keywords: foreign language anxiety, speaking anxiety, academic presentations, EFL, higher education, Uzbekistan

Introduction

This study will examine why many university EFL students feel anxious when they give academic presentations in English, how this anxiety affects their performance, and whether structured classroom support can reduce it.

At an international university, students are expected to present projects, defend ideas in seminars and answer questions in English. For many of them, this is the most stressful part of their studies. In my own classes, I regularly see capable students whose voices shake, who read directly from their slides, or who avoid eye contact and questions. Some of them know the content well and have good written English, but anxiety stops them from showing what they can do.

Researchers have studied language anxiety for almost forty years. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) argued that foreign language anxiety is a specific kind of anxiety, linked to the experience of communicating in a language one has not fully mastered[1]. Since then, many studies have shown that anxiety is connected with lower performance, especially in speaking (Horwitz, 2001; Teimouri, Goetze & Plonsky, 2019).

Academic presentations combine two difficult things: speaking in a foreign language and speaking in public in front of classmates and teachers who will evaluate you. This makes them a particularly important area for research and for teaching.

The question also matters at the national level. Since Presidential Decree No. 1875 (2012), Uzbekistan has invested heavily in foreign language education, and universities increasingly teach

[1] Horwitz, E. K. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 21*, 112–126.

© Ushbu material Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) litsenziyasi asosida tarqatiladi.

through English. Graduates who can present confidently in English are better prepared for international study and work.

Problem statement and research gap

Presentation anxiety holds back many EFL university students, yet we know very little about it in Uzbekistan and have little tested guidance on how teachers can reduce it.

Most research on language anxiety looks at general classroom speaking, not at academic presentations specifically. Many studies also come from China, Iran, Turkey, Japan and Western countries (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Woodrow, 2006). Central Asian learners, who often grow up with Uzbek, Russian or both, are rarely included.

A second gap concerns solutions. Many studies describe anxiety and its causes but stop there. Fewer test practical classroom strategies over time and measure whether anxiety actually goes down (Young, 1991; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009).

This study addresses both gaps. It will first describe the level and sources of presentation anxiety among Uzbek university students, and then test a structured presentation training programme in real classes.

Aims and research questions

The study aims to understand presentation anxiety among EFL university students in Uzbekistan and to test one practical way of reducing it.

Phase 1 (survey):

1. How anxious are EFL university students when speaking and presenting in English?
2. What are the main sources of their anxiety?
3. Does anxiety differ by gender, year of study or English proficiency level?
4. Is there a relationship between anxiety and presentation performance?

Phase 2 (intervention):

5. Does a structured presentation training programme reduce students' anxiety and improve their presentation performance?
6. How do students and teachers experience the programme?

Hypothesis: Students who take part in the training programme will show lower anxiety and better presentation performance than students in regular classes.

Literature review

Research agrees that speaking anxiety is common, that it usually lowers performance, and that teachers can reduce it, but most of this evidence comes from outside Central Asia and outside academic presentation settings.

What is foreign language anxiety?

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) described foreign language anxiety as a distinct set of feelings, beliefs and behaviours connected to classroom language learning. They linked it to three related fears:

Communication apprehension: fear of speaking with or in front of others (McCroskey, 1977).
Fear of negative evaluation: worry about what others will think (Watson & Friend, 1969).
Test anxiety: fear of failing when performance is judged.

All three are present in an academic presentation, where students speak publicly, are watched by peers and are graded by a teacher.

How anxiety affects speaking?

Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that anxiety acts like a mental block, reducing how much language learners can take in and use. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) showed that anxiety can

© Ushbu material Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) litsenziyasi asosida tarqatiladi.

disrupt language processing at several stages, from taking in information to producing speech[2]. A meta-analysis by Teimouri, Goetze and Plonsky (2019) confirmed that higher anxiety is generally linked to lower achievement, with the link being clear across many studies.

Anxious learners also judge their own speaking more harshly. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) found that anxious students were more perfectionist and more critical of their own oral performance[3].

Studies point to several common causes:

low confidence in one's own English, especially vocabulary and pronunciation
fear of making mistakes in front of classmates
the teacher's error correction style
unfamiliar topics or lack of preparation time
large audiences and formal settings (Young, 1991; Woodrow, 2006; Liu & Jackson, 2008)

Woodrow (2006) found that speaking to native speakers and performing in front of the class were among the most stressful situations for learners.

More recent research looks at positive emotions too. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) introduced foreign language enjoyment and showed that anxiety and enjoyment are separate dimensions, not simply opposites[4]. A learner can feel both at once. This suggests that teachers should not only reduce fear but also build enjoyment (MacIntyre, 2017).

Researchers recommend a supportive classroom atmosphere, gentle error correction, more small-group work before whole-class speaking, and clear preparation stages (Young, 1991; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). For presentations specifically, rehearsal, peer feedback and gradual exposure to larger audiences are often suggested. However, few studies have tested such a programme systematically with university students over a full semester.

The literature gives a strong theoretical base and a clear set of likely causes. What is missing is evidence from Uzbekistan, a focus on academic presentations, and tested classroom interventions. This study is designed to address all three.

Methodology

The study will use a two-phase mixed-methods design: a survey to describe the problem, followed by a quasi-experimental intervention with interviews (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).[5]

Phase 1: Survey

Participants: about 200 undergraduate students from different faculties and years at an international university in Uzbekistan.

Instruments:

the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986), adapted to focus on speaking and presentations
a short background section (gender, year, faculty, English level)
open questions asking students to describe their worst and best presentation experiences
presentation grades or rubric scores, where students consent to share them

[2] Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon.
[3] Gregersen, T., & Horwitz, E. K. (2002). Language learning and perfectionism: Anxious and non-anxious language learners' reactions to their own oral performance. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*(4), 562–570.
[4] Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014). The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 4*(2), 237–274.
[5] Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). Sage.

© Ushbu material Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) litsenziyasi asosida tarqatiladi.

The questionnaire will be piloted with a small group first and checked for reliability (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). It may be offered in English and Uzbek or Russian so that weaker students can answer accurately.

Analysis: descriptive statistics, t-tests or ANOVA to compare groups, and correlation between anxiety and performance scores. Open answers will be coded for common themes.

Phase 2: Intervention

Participants: two intact classes at a similar level (about 30 students each). One will receive the training programme; the other will follow regular lessons.

The programme (about 10–12 weeks) will be built from the Phase 1 findings and the literature. Planned stages:

1. Awareness: students discuss anxiety openly and learn that it is common.
2. Language support: useful phrases for opening, signposting, handling questions and closing.
3. Gradual exposure: speaking first in pairs, then small groups, then to the whole class.
4. Rehearsal and feedback: practice presentations with supportive peer feedback using a simple checklist.
5. Video self-reflection: students record a practice talk and note their strengths.
6. Final presentation: a graded academic presentation.

Table 1. Overview of Research Instruments for the Intervention Phase

Instrument	Purpose	When
Adapted FLCAS	Anxiety level	Before and after
Presentation rubric (two raters)	Performance	First and final presentation
Student reflective journals	Feelings and changes over time	Throughout
Semi-structured interviews (about 10 students, 3–4 teachers)	Experiences of the programme	After the programme

Analysis: ANCOVA to compare post-test anxiety and performance, controlling for pre-test scores, with effect sizes reported. Journals and interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)[6].

Significance, timeline, ethics and limitations

Significance

For research: the first detailed study of presentation anxiety among university students in Uzbekistan, combining a large survey with a tested intervention.

For teachers: a ready-to-use presentation training programme and practical advice for supportive feedback.

For students: better confidence and skills for academic and professional life in English.

For institutions: evidence to guide English-medium instruction and teacher training.

Anxiety is a personal topic, so care is especially important. Participants will receive clear information and sign consent forms, and they may leave at any time with no effect on their grades. Responses will be anonymous or coded. Interview questions will be gentle, and students will not be pushed to talk about experiences they find upsetting. Information about the university's student support service will be shared with all participants. Because I may teach some participants, a colleague will

[6] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101.

© Ushbu material Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) litsenziyasi asosida tarqatiladi.

collect consent and a second rater will score presentations. The control group will be offered the programme materials after the study.

Limitations

The survey relies on self-reported feelings, which may not always be accurate. The intervention uses intact classes, not random groups, and takes place at one university, so results may not apply everywhere. One semester may also be too short to show lasting change.

References

1. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101.
2. Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). Designing and conducting mixed methods research (3rd ed.). Sage.
3. Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014). The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 4(2), 237–274.
4. Dörnyei, Z., & Taguchi, T. (2010). Questionnaires in second language research: Construction, administration, and processing (2nd ed.). Routledge.
5. Gregersen, T., & Horwitz, E. K. (2002). Language learning and perfectionism: Anxious and non-anxious language learners' reactions to their own oral performance. The Modern Language Journal, 86(4), 562–570.
6. Horwitz, E. K. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 21, 112–126.
7. Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. The Modern Language Journal, 70(2), 125–132.
8. Krashen, S. D. (1982). Principles and practice in second language acquisition. Pergamon.
9. Liu, M., & Jackson, J. (2008). An exploration of Chinese EFL learners' unwillingness to communicate and foreign language anxiety. The Modern Language Journal, 92(1), 71–86.
10. MacIntyre, P. D. (2017). An overview of language anxiety research and trends in its development. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney, & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications (pp. 11–30). Multilingual Matters.

© Ushbu material Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) litsenziyasi asosida tarqatiladi.