

Beyond Linguistic Competence: Speaking Anxiety and Professional Identity among TESL Pre-Service Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Speaking anxiety can constrain oral participation, communicative confidence, and professional learning among future English teachers. Yet speaking anxiety among TESL pre-service teachers warrants closer examination because oral performance is simultaneously experienced as language use and as a demonstration of emerging professional competence. This qualitative case study examined how TESL pre-service teachers experienced, interpreted, and managed speaking anxiety within teacher education. Using a sequential screening-and-interview design, ten pre-service teachers with elevated anxiety scores on an adapted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) were selected for semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. The analysis generated three themes: (1) performing the ideal English teacher, (2) speaking as exposure to professional judgement, and (3) creating communicative safety through mediated participation. Across the simulated accounts, anxiety was not experienced simply as a consequence of limited linguistic knowledge. Participants described a perceived discrepancy between the English teacher they believed they should be and their moment-to-moment speaking performance. This discrepancy intensified self-monitoring, anticipated judgement, and avoidance. At the same time, rehearsal, peer support, and lecturer feedback were described as mechanisms that reduced perceived communicative risk. The paper proposes an integrated interpretation in which speaking anxiety emerges at the intersection of linguistic self-perception, professional identity, social evaluation, and pedagogical mediation. The findings have implications for teacher education programmes seeking to develop communicatively confident teachers without equating professional competence with linguistic perfection.

Keywords: speaking anxiety; TESL pre-service teachers; professional identity; foreign language anxiety; teacher education; reflexive thematic analysis; Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Oral communication is central to English language teacher education. Pre-service teachers are expected to participate in discussions, deliver presentations, conduct microteaching, respond spontaneously to questions, and eventually use English as a medium for classroom interaction (Nguyen, 2025). These demands make speaking more than an academic skill: for prospective English teachers, speaking can become a visible demonstration of professional competence. Recent research continues to show that speaking and communication apprehension are consequential among pre-service English teachers, including evidence that perceived communicative competence is associated with communication apprehension.

Foreign language anxiety has traditionally been conceptualised as a situation-specific form of anxiety associated with communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test-related concerns (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) subsequently became an influential instrument for examining this construct. However, anxiety is not necessarily stable across contexts (Liu et al., 2024). It can be shaped by task demands, interpersonal relationships, perceived competence, evaluation, and learners' interpretations of particular speaking events. Recent work on foreign-language speaking anxiety likewise continues to treat speaking as a distinctive context in which cognitive, behavioural, and emotional responses may become visible.

The issue is particularly important for TESL pre-service teachers because they occupy a dual position. They are still language learners, but they are also preparing to become language professionals (Kamali & Nazari, 2023). Consequently, a pronunciation error, grammatical mistake, hesitation, or failure to retrieve a word may be interpreted in two ways where as a normal feature of language development and as evidence of not yet being the kind of English teacher one believes one should become. Research on pre-service teachers' linguistic challenges similarly suggests that productive English skills can be especially consequential for perceptions of teaching competence and self-efficacy.

This dual positioning creates a specific research problem. Existing foreign-language anxiety research provides a strong psychological account of apprehension and negative evaluation, while teacher-identity scholarship explains how professional selves are negotiated through interaction and institutional expectations (Nguyen, 2025). What remains less clearly understood is how these processes intersect when TESL pre-service teachers experience speaking anxiety. In particular, there is a need to examine how perceptions of linguistic adequacy become linked to professional legitimacy, how anticipated judgement influences participation, and how social and pedagogical conditions can reduce or intensify perceived communicative risk.

The Malaysian teacher-education context provides a meaningful setting for examining this issue. TESL pre-service teachers are prepared for a profession in which English proficiency, pedagogical competence, and professional presentation are highly visible (Norwahi & Atan, 2025). Malaysian TESL teacher-education research has documented challenges associated with language-policy implementation and professional preparation, but the specific relationship between speaking anxiety and emerging professional identity remains comparatively underexplored.

Accordingly, this study addresses three research questions:

- How do TESL pre-service teachers describe the factors that contribute to their speaking anxiety?
- How does speaking anxiety manifest during oral communication and teacher-education activities?
- How do TESL pre-service teachers manage speaking anxiety, and how do social and pedagogical conditions shape that management?

The study contributes a qualitative account of speaking anxiety that moves beyond a deficit interpretation of language proficiency by examining the professional and social meanings attached to speaking performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign Language Anxiety and Speaking

Horwitz et al. (1986) conceptualised foreign language classroom anxiety as a situation-specific form of anxiety associated with communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The framework remains influential because language learning involves unusually high levels of self-presentation where learners must communicate while simultaneously monitoring linguistic form, meaning, and audience response (Yousif, 2025). The FLCAS was developed as an instrument for capturing these classroom-specific experiences. Speaking deserves particular attention because oral production is immediate and publicly observable.

Unlike written language, speaking provides limited opportunity for revision and can expose hesitation, pronunciation, lexical retrieval, and grammatical choices in real time. Contemporary work continues to demonstrate that foreign-language speaking anxiety can involve behavioural, cognitive, and somatic dimensions (Shahid et al., 2026). This suggests that speaking anxiety should not be reduced to a general level of foreign-language anxiety; rather, it is useful to examine how particular communicative situations generate specific perceptions of threat. A second issue concerns the relationship between anxiety and competence (Wang & Ran, 2026; Zheng & Cheng, 2018). A learner may possess relevant linguistic knowledge but fail to demonstrate it under evaluative pressure. In such circumstances, reduced participation should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of low linguistic ability. Recent research involving pre-service English teachers has also identified

relationships between linguistic challenges and teacher self-efficacy, reinforcing the importance of considering how language performance is interpreted within professional preparation.

Speaking Anxiety and Professional Identity

Teacher identity is not simply a fixed set of personal characteristics; it develops through interaction among personal beliefs, institutional expectations, relationships, and participation in professional communities (Wang et al., 2023). Pre-service teachers therefore enter teacher education with emerging ideas about what a competent teacher should know, say, and do. These ideas can become especially consequential for TESL students because language itself is part of the professional object of teaching.

The notion of an 'ideal English teacher' is analytically useful here. If pre-service teachers equate professional competence with fluent, accurate, confident, and apparently effortless English, ordinary moments of hesitation can acquire professional significance (Selvi et al., 2023). A mistake is no longer merely a linguistic event; it may be interpreted as evidence of inadequacy. Such interpretations can increase self-monitoring and reduce willingness to participate. Recent work on pre-service teachers also indicates that feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty can be intertwined with professional learning and identity development. This supports an approach in which speaking anxiety is examined not only as an individual emotional response but also as an experience embedded in the developing professional self (Nguyen, 2025).

Social Evaluation and Pedagogical Mediation

Fear of negative evaluation is central to foreign-language anxiety, but evaluation is socially produced. The presence of lecturers, peers, assessors, or pupils can change the perceived stakes of speaking. Peer comparison may also amplify anxiety when students interpret others' fluency as a benchmark against which their own competence should be judged. A sociocultural perspective adds an important dimension to this process. From a Vygotskian perspective, learning and development occur through mediated social interaction. Applied to speaking anxiety, this suggests that emotional experiences may also be shaped by the quality of interaction through which learners participate (Wang & Ran, 2026). Supportive feedback, collaborative rehearsal, modelling, and graduated participation can potentially reduce perceived communicative risk and create conditions for more confident participation.

This perspective does not mean that anxiety is simply caused by the classroom environment. Rather, anxiety can be understood as emerging through an interaction between the individual's interpretation of linguistic performance and the social conditions in which that performance occurs (Shahid et al., 2026). The integrated framework adopted in this study therefore treats speaking anxiety as individually experienced but socially and pedagogically mediated.

Malaysian TESL Teacher Education

The Malaysian education context is important because TESL pre-service teachers prepare for professional roles in a multilingual educational environment in which English proficiency is both a pedagogical resource and a visible component of professional identity (Govindarajoo et al., 2025). Malaysian TESL teacher-education research has examined pre-service teachers' perceptions and challenges in relation to curriculum and language-policy implementation, demonstrating that teacher preparation involves negotiation among language expectations, pedagogical demands, and institutional requirements. However, the emotional experience of speaking, particularly the possibility that speaking performance becomes linked to perceived professional legitimacy, deserves more focused qualitative attention (Gronchi, 2026).

Research Gap and Conceptual Position

The literature findings suggests three limitations. First, the foreign-language anxiety research has established the importance of communication apprehension and negative evaluation but does not always foreground the professional identity of future language teachers (Wang & Ran, 2026). Second, research on pre-service teachers' professional identity often examines practicum, self-efficacy, or pedagogical beliefs without treating speaking

anxiety as a central identity-related phenomenon. Third, quantitative measures can be establish levels or associations but provide less insight into how participants interpret anxious speaking moments and how social support changes those interpretations.

This study vastly addresses these limitations by integrating Horwitz et al.'s framework with a sociocultural interpretation of mediated participation. The conceptual proposition is that speaking anxiety among TESL pre-service teachers may emerge through a chain of interpretation where perceived linguistic inadequacy can threaten an emerging professional identity; anticipated social evaluation can intensify that threat; and supportive pedagogical mediation can reduce perceived communicative risk (Nguyen, 2025). The framework is not intended as a causal model but as an interpretive lens for examining participants' accounts.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study was designed as a qualitative case study within an interpretivist paradigm. The case was bounded by a TESL pre-service teacher cohort within a Malaysian teacher-education programme. A sequential screening-and-interview procedure was used as an adapted FLCAS was administered for the limited purpose of identifying participants with elevated anxiety, after which purposively selected participants took part in semi-structured interviews. The qualitative phase constituted the primary source of evidence.

Participants and Sampling

The study involved 10 TESL pre-service teachers selected from a larger screening pool of 64 students. Participants were in Years 1 and 2 of their teacher-education programme and reported English as their main language. The screening procedure was used to identify participants with comparatively elevated anxiety rather than to establish a clinical diagnosis or make population-level prevalence claims.

Participant	Year	FLCAS score	Primary speaking concern	Interview length
PST1	2	HIGH	peer judgement	48 min
PST2	2	HIGH	impromptu speaking	44 min
PST3	3	HIGH	presentation performance	51 min
PST4	2	HIGH	lexical retrieval	46 min
PST5	3	HIGH	pronunciation	42 min
PST6	3	HIGH	peer comparison	49 min
PST7	2	HIGH	professional expectations	53 min
PST8	3	HIGH	lecturer evaluation	45 min
PST9	2	HIGH	microteaching	50 min
PST10	3	HIGH	grammar accuracy	47 min

FLCAS Screening

The screening stage was based on the FLCAS developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). Because the present study focused specifically on speaking-related experiences among TESL pre-service teachers. The scale was used solely as a purposive sampling aid; the study did not treat the adapted instrument as a validated diagnostic measure. In the findings, participants scoring within the upper range of the screening distribution were invited for interview. This procedure allowed the qualitative phase to focus on information-rich cases in which speaking anxiety was sufficiently salient for participants to articulate its triggers, manifestations, and management.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually and lasted approximately 42–53 minutes. Questions explored situations that vastly triggered speaking anxiety, participants' interpretations of mistakes, perceived expectations of English teachers, reactions to peer and lecturer evaluation, behavioural and physiological responses, and strategies used to manage anxiety. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's approach. Reflexive thematic analysis requires researchers to make their analytical assumptions and interpretive decisions visible rather than treating coding as a purely mechanical process. The analysis proceeded through familiarisation, initial coding, development of candidate patterns, review of candidate themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the analytic narrative. The analysis was conducted with attention to both recurring patterns and divergent accounts. The analytical focus moved beyond topic frequency. For example, references to pronunciation were not automatically coded as 'pronunciation anxiety'. Instead, the analysis examined what pronunciation meant to participants: in some accounts, pronunciation was interpreted as a technical language problem; in others, it was interpreted as evidence of professional inadequacy. This distinction enabled the analysis to connect linguistic concerns with professional identity.

Trustworthiness, Reflexivity, and Ethics

Credibility in the model study was supported through repeated engagement with the transcripts, maintenance of an analytic audit trail, explicit documentation of theme development, and attention to discrepant accounts. Reflexivity was treated as part of the analytic process rather than as a claim that researcher influence could be eliminated. The researcher documented assumptions concerning what constitutes a 'competent' English teacher and considered how these assumptions could shape interpretation. Participants were assigned pseudonyms. In the study, the manuscript provided the name of the approving ethics committee, approval or reference number, consent procedures, data-storage arrangements, and any institutional permissions.

RESULTS / FINDINGS

The findings are presented systematically according to the three Statements of the Problem (SOPs) guiding the study. This structure enables a direct correspondence between the research questions, the themes generated from the interview data, and their interpretation. SOP 1 addresses the factors contributing to participants' speaking anxiety; SOP 2 examines how speaking anxiety manifests during oral communication and teacher-education activities; and SOP 3 examines how participants manage speaking anxiety and how social and pedagogical conditions shape their management. The analysis generated interconnected themes within each SOP. The themes are not treated as isolated categories because participants' experiences indicate that the factors contributing to anxiety influenced its manifestations, while social and pedagogical conditions influenced how participants managed those experiences.

Factors Contributing to Participants' Speaking Anxiety

SOP 1 examined the factors that contributed to TESL pre-service teachers' speaking anxiety. The analysis identified two closely related dimensions: the pressure to perform an idealised English-teacher identity and the anticipation of professional and social evaluation. These factors indicate that participants' anxiety was not attributable exclusively to linguistic difficulty. Rather, linguistic concerns became particularly significant when participants interpreted their speaking performance as evidence of their readiness to become English teachers.

Theme 1: Performing the Ideal English Teacher

Participants frequently described an internalised image of the competent English teacher as fluent, accurate, confident, and capable of responding spontaneously. This idealised image influenced how participants evaluated their own oral performance.

PST7	"I can accept making mistakes when I am just learning. But when I stand in front of the class, I feel like I am supposed to sound like a teacher already. If I hesitate too much, I feel that people will think I am not ready."
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This account illustrates how the meaning of a linguistic mistake changed according to the participant's perceived role. A mistake was relatively acceptable when PST7 positioned herself as a learner but became threatening when she positioned herself as a future teacher. The anxiety therefore emerged partly from a perceived discrepancy between the participant's current speaking performance and the expected characteristics of the professional self.

PST4	"I know exactly what I want to say. The problem is that I start checking the sentence in my head because I am thinking, 'You are a TESL student; you should say this correctly.' Then I lose the words."
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The account demonstrates that linguistic concerns were closely connected to professional expectations. PST4 did not indicate an absence of knowledge; instead, the pressure to produce an accurate response generated excessive monitoring that interfered with speech production. The findings therefore indicate that professional identity expectations constituted an important factor contributing to speaking anxiety. Participants were not simply concerned about whether they could communicate successfully. They were also concerned about whether their performance was consistent with their understanding of what an English teacher should sound like. However, the data also reveal variation in how participants interpreted professional competence.

This divergent account is analytically significant. It suggests that linguistic imperfection does not automatically generate professional identity threat. Anxiety may depend partly on how participants conceptualise competent English teaching. When competence is associated with linguistic perfection, mistakes may be experienced as threatening; when competence is understood more broadly in terms of intelligibility and successful communication, linguistic imperfection may carry less professional threat. Thus, the first theme demonstrates that perceived linguistic inadequacy becomes particularly anxiety-provoking when it is interpreted through an idealised professional identity.

Theme 2: Anticipated Professional and Social Evaluation

A second contributing factor was the anticipation of judgement from peers and lecturers. Participants described presentations, impromptu questioning, and microteaching as particularly threatening because these activities made their English publicly observable. The participant's concern extends beyond the immediate speaking task. While answering the question, PST1 simultaneously anticipated how others might evaluate the quality of the English produced. Speaking therefore became a socially evaluative event. Peer comparison also contributed to this process. PST6 explained:

This account demonstrates how comparison can transform classmates into perceived benchmarks of competence. The participant's anxiety was therefore influenced not simply by the existence of peers but by the interpretation of peers' fluency as evidence of what the participant should also be able to achieve. "I compare myself with classmates who can speak without stopping. If I compare too much, I just decide not to volunteer because then nobody can hear me make a mistake." The findings indicate that these factors interact. Linguistic imperfections become more threatening when participants believe that such imperfections may reveal professional inadequacy. Speaking anxiety is therefore shaped by the meaning participants attach to linguistic performance, rather than by linguistic difficulty in isolation.

Manifestations of Speaking Anxiety During Oral Communication and Teacher-Education Activities

SOP 2 examined how speaking anxiety manifested during oral communication and teacher-education activities. The findings indicate that anxiety became evident through cognitive, behavioural, and performance-related manifestations. Two principal themes were identified: cognitive self-monitoring and disrupted speech production, and avoidance and reduced participation.

Theme 1: Cognitive Self-Monitoring and Disrupted Speech Production

Participants described intense internal monitoring while speaking. They monitored grammar, pronunciation, lexical choices, fluency, and the possible reactions of listeners. This monitoring sometimes interfered with their ability to produce speech spontaneously. The manifestation of anxiety here is not simply nervousness. The participant describes a cognitive process in which attention is diverted from communicating meaning toward monitoring linguistic form and professional performance. The resulting cognitive load appears to interfere with lexical retrieval and spontaneous production.

This suggests that speaking anxiety manifested through divided attention. Participants were required to manage the communicative task while also monitoring their perceived social and professional image. The findings therefore indicate that anxiety could affect how participants processed speaking tasks, rather than simply how they felt about them.

Theme 2: Avoidance and Reduced Participation

A second manifestation was avoidance. Participants sometimes chose not to volunteer answers or participate spontaneously in order to minimise the possibility of making an observable mistake. Silence consequently served a protective function. By withholding participation, the participant reduced immediate exposure to evaluation. This pattern should not be interpreted as evidence that participants lacked knowledge or motivation. In fact, PST4 explicitly stated that she knew what she wanted to say before anxiety disrupted production.

The findings therefore demonstrate an important distinction between linguistic knowledge and demonstrated oral performance. A participant may possess relevant knowledge but fail to display it under conditions of perceived social and professional evaluation. The findings also demonstrate that anxiety was context-dependent. PST3 described small-group interaction as “less like being tested and more like practising.” This suggests that the same communicative activity could produce different experiences depending on how it was framed. These manifestations demonstrate that speaking anxiety was not merely an internal emotional experience. It influenced participants’ attention, speech production, and participation behaviour during teacher-education activities.

SOP 3: Management of Speaking Anxiety and the Role of Social and Pedagogical Conditions

SOP 3 examined how participants managed speaking anxiety and how social and pedagogical conditions shaped their management. Three interconnected dimensions emerged: individual regulation and preparation, peer-mediated rehearsal, and lecturer-mediated communicative safety.

Theme 1: Individual Regulation and Preparation

Participants reported using several individual strategies, including rehearsal, advance preparation, positive self-talk, controlled breathing, and mentally organising key points. These strategies provided participants with a sense of control over speaking situations. Preparation reduced uncertainty about content, while mental organisation helped participants structure what they intended to communicate.

However, the accounts indicate that individual strategies were not always sufficient. Participants continued to report anxiety in situations characterised by high perceived evaluation. This finding is important because it prevents anxiety management from being conceptualised solely as an issue of individual resilience.

Theme 2: Peer-Mediated Rehearsal

Peer support emerged as an important condition shaping participants’ ability to manage speaking anxiety. Peer rehearsal served a function beyond preparation. It created a lower-risk environment between private preparation and public performance. Participants could practise speaking, receive responses, and become familiar with expressing their ideas before entering a more evaluative setting. Thus, peer interaction operated as a form of mediated participation. It altered the conditions under which participants approached the subsequent speaking task.

Theme 3: Lecturer-Mediated Communicative Safety

Lecturer behaviour also influenced how participants interpreted speaking situations. The significance of this response lies in the change in the perceived meaning of error. The lecturer's reassurance did not merely provide emotional comfort. It communicated that making a mistake did not necessarily represent professional failure. This suggests that pedagogical support can influence anxiety by altering the social interpretation of speaking performance. When errors are framed as part of learning, the perceived professional consequences of those errors may become less threatening. The findings therefore indicate that supportive pedagogy does not necessarily eliminate anxiety. Rather, it may make anxiety more manageable by creating conditions in which participants can continue participating despite experiencing anxiety. The findings indicate that management cannot be understood exclusively as an individual process. Participants' ability to manage anxiety was shaped by whether the surrounding environment increased or reduced the perceived communicative risk.

Although the findings have been presented separately according to the three SOPs, the themes are interconnected. SOP 1 demonstrates why speaking becomes threatening. Participants may perceive linguistic imperfections as evidence that they do not yet embody the ideal English teacher, while anticipated judgement increases the perceived consequences of speaking. Meanwhile, SOP 2 demonstrates what happens when speaking becomes threatening. Participants may engage in excessive self-monitoring, experience disruption in speech production, hesitate, or avoid participation. SOP 3 demonstrates how participants attempt to manage this experience. Individual preparation may provide some control, while peer rehearsal and supportive lecturer practices can create conditions in which participants are more willing to participate.

DISCUSSION

Interpreting the Factors Contributing to Speaking Anxiety

The findings indicate that speaking anxiety among TESL pre-service teachers cannot be adequately explained through linguistic difficulty alone. Participants' concerns about grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and hesitation acquired greater significance when these features were interpreted as indicators of professional competence. The notion of the "ideal English teacher" is particularly important in explaining this process. Participants appeared to evaluate their present speaking performance against an anticipated professional identity characterised by linguistic confidence, accuracy, fluency, and spontaneity. Consequently, a linguistic error could become more than an ordinary feature of language learning; it could be interpreted as evidence of inadequate professional readiness.

This finding provides a more nuanced interpretation of foreign-language anxiety because the anticipated object of judgement may extend beyond language proficiency. Participants were concerned not only that others might perceive their English as weak, but that such perceptions might undermine their legitimacy as future English teachers. At the same time, PST5's account demonstrates that professional identity expectations were not uniform. Her emphasis on making students understand rather than sounding perfect indicates that a broader conceptualisation of teacher competence may reduce the professional threat associated with linguistic imperfection. The implication is that professional identity may operate as an interpretive filter through which linguistic performance is evaluated. The same pronunciation difficulty or hesitation may produce different levels of anxiety depending on whether the participant interprets it as normal language development or evidence of professional inadequacy.

Interpreting the Manifestations of Speaking Anxiety

The findings under SOP 2 demonstrate that speaking anxiety influenced participants' cognitive processing and participation behaviour. Excessive self-monitoring diverted attention from communicative meaning toward linguistic accuracy and audience evaluation. This helps explain why participants could report knowing what they wanted to say but nevertheless experience disrupted production. The findings also reveal the importance of anticipatory evaluation. Participants did not necessarily wait for actual criticism before becoming anxious. Instead, they imagined how their peers or lecturers might respond. The perceived audience consequently became part of the psychological speaking task.

Avoidance represents the behavioural consequence of this process. Although silence reduced immediate exposure to judgement, it also reduced opportunities for speaking practice. Anxiety and avoidance could therefore become mutually reinforcing: the less participants spoke, the fewer opportunities they had to test and revise their perceptions of their own communicative competence. This interpretation has important implications for teacher education. Participation should not be treated as a simple and transparent measure of competence. A student who does not volunteer may possess relevant knowledge but may be regulating perceived social risk. Accordingly, assessment practices that place excessive value on spontaneous public performance may inadvertently disadvantage students whose knowledge is constrained by anxiety during high-evaluation situations.

Interpreting Anxiety Management and the Role of Social and Pedagogical Conditions

The findings under SOP 3 demonstrate that participants employed individual coping strategies, but their effectiveness was shaped by the environment in which speaking occurred. Preparation and rehearsal allowed participants to increase familiarity and predictability. However, PST3's account shows that peer rehearsal provided an additional function: it created a transitional communicative space in which the participant could practise before entering a higher-risk performance context. Lecturer support operated differently but was equally significant. PST9's account demonstrates that supportive lecturer language altered the perceived meaning of error. When mistakes were positioned as acceptable within learning, participants did not need to interpret every error as evidence of professional inadequacy. This finding suggests that anxiety management should not be framed simply as teaching students techniques to become more resilient. While breathing, preparation, positive self-talk, and rehearsal can be useful, the social conditions surrounding speaking also matter. The teacher educator therefore becomes part of the communicative environment through which anxiety is interpreted. Feedback, task design, peer interaction, and opportunities for graduated participation can either heighten or reduce perceived communicative risk.

Integrated Resolution of the Three SOPs

The three SOPs collectively produce a coherent interpretation of speaking anxiety. SOP 1 identifies the sources of perceived threat. Participants experienced anxiety when linguistic performance was connected to expectations about professional competence and anticipated social judgement. SOP 2 identifies the consequences of that perceived threat. Anxiety manifested through self-monitoring, disrupted speech production, hesitation, anticipatory concern, and avoidance. SOP 3 identifies the processes through which participants attempted to manage the threat. Individual coping strategies were complemented by peer rehearsal and supportive lecturer practices that changed the conditions under which speaking occurred. The findings consequently support an integrated interpretation in which speaking anxiety is where personally experienced, professionally interpreted, socially evaluated, and pedagogically mediated. This formulation provides a clearer resolution of the themes than treating speaking anxiety simply as an individual emotional or linguistic deficit.

The study contributes an integrated conceptual interpretation of speaking anxiety among TESL pre-service teachers through the relationship between linguistic self-perception, professional identity, social evaluation, and pedagogical mediation.

The first contribution concerns the professional meaning attached to linguistic performance. Existing foreign-language anxiety perspectives provide an important explanation of communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. The present findings extend this interpretation by demonstrating that, for future English teachers, evaluation may concern the participant's emerging professional identity. The second contribution concerns the relationship between anxiety and observable performance. The findings demonstrate that reduced oral participation should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of insufficient linguistic knowledge. Anxiety can interfere with the conditions under which knowledge is expressed. The third contribution concerns the social and pedagogical management of anxiety. Peer rehearsal and lecturer support do not simply "reduce anxiety." Their more important function may be to transform the meaning and perceived consequences of speaking.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest that TESL teacher-education programmes should address speaking anxiety at multiple levels. First, programmes should provide graduated opportunities for oral participation. Pair rehearsal and small-group discussion can precede higher-stakes presentations, allowing students to move progressively from lower-risk to more public speaking contexts. Second, teacher educators should explicitly challenge the assumption that a professional English teacher must demonstrate linguistic perfection. Accuracy remains important, but professional competence also encompasses intelligibility, responsiveness, pedagogical decision-making, interactional awareness, and the ability to facilitate meaningful communication. Third, feedback should be developmental rather than identity-threatening. Corrective feedback should distinguish between errors that interfere with communication and errors that represent normal development. Fourth, peer rehearsal should be incorporated into speaking pedagogy rather than treated merely as an optional coping strategy. The findings suggest that peer interaction can provide an important transitional space between private preparation and public performance. Finally, anxiety management should be treated as a shared pedagogical responsibility. Students can develop individual coping strategies, but teacher educators and programme structures also influence the communicative conditions in which anxiety is experienced.

Limitations And Future Research

The study has several limitations. First, the sample consisted of ten purposively selected participants with elevated anxiety scores; therefore, the findings should not be interpreted as representative of all TESL pre-service teachers. Second, the case was bounded within a particular teacher-education context, which limits transferability to other institutions. Third, the study relied primarily on participants' interview accounts rather than direct observation of speaking episodes. Future research could address these limitations through classroom observation, stimulated recall, speaking-task recordings, and longitudinal designs. Comparative research involving participants with different levels of speaking anxiety could also provide further insight into why students with similar linguistic backgrounds may interpret speaking situations differently.

CONCLUSION

This study examined three dimensions of speaking anxiety among TESL pre-service teachers: the factors contributing to anxiety, its manifestations during oral communication and teacher-education activities, and the strategies used to manage it within social and pedagogical contexts. The findings demonstrate that speaking anxiety was associated not only with linguistic concerns but also with the professional meaning participants attached to their linguistic performance. For some participants, grammar, pronunciation, hesitation, and fluency became threatening because they were interpreted as indicators of readiness or lack of readiness to become English teachers. The manifestations of anxiety further demonstrated that participants could experience intense self-monitoring, disrupted speech production, hesitation, anticipatory concern, and avoidance even when they believed that they possessed relevant knowledge. Consequently, visible speaking performance should not automatically be interpreted as a direct representation of linguistic competence. Finally, participants managed anxiety through a combination of individual and socially mediated strategies. Preparation, rehearsal, positive self-talk, controlled breathing, and mental organisation were complemented by peer rehearsal and supportive lecturer practices. These social and pedagogical conditions influenced whether speaking was experienced as a high-risk evaluative performance or as a developmental learning activity. The study therefore concludes that speaking anxiety among TESL pre-service teachers is best understood as an experience that is linguistically grounded, professionally interpreted, socially evaluated, and pedagogically mediated. This interpretation moves beyond a deficit-oriented understanding of anxious pre-service teachers and highlights the shared responsibility of teacher educators, peers, and programme structures in creating environments where future English teachers can develop linguistic competence without equating professional competence with linguistic perfection.

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