

## MIND OVER SPEECH: THE ROLE OF ANXIETY IN EFL STUDENTS' ORAL PRESENTATION PERFORMANCE

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### Abstract

Oral presentation is a crucial academic and professional skill that reflects communicative competence and self-confidence, yet it remains one of the main sources of anxiety among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Despite extensive research on speaking anxiety, limited attention has been given to the specific demands of oral presentations, where students must perform under evaluation and linguistic pressure. This study aimed to examine the role of anxiety in EFL students' oral presentation performance, focusing on Saudi female undergraduates at King Khalid University. A quantitative descriptive design was adopted, and data were collected through a validated questionnaire administered to thirty students in the Department of English. The instrument, showing high reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.81$ ), measured four dimensions: psychological, linguistic, situational, and preparation-related factors. Descriptive statistical analysis using SPSS revealed that psychological anxiety was the most influential variable, followed by preparation and linguistic limitations. Participants reported shyness, fear of mistakes, and concern over negative evaluation as key stressors. Although structured rehearsal improved confidence, overreliance on memorization increased tension. The findings highlight that effective oral performance depends on both linguistic ability and psychological readiness. The study concludes that integrating anxiety-reduction strategies, reflective practice, and confidence-building training within EFL curricula can enhance learners' oral communication skills and overall performance.

**Keywords:** Anxiety, EFL Students, Oral Presentation Performance, Psychological Readiness, Saudi Higher Education

### INTRODUCTION

Oral presentation is a vital communicative skill in higher education, functioning both as an instructional tool and as an assessment method. It enables students to organize their ideas, articulate arguments coherently, and demonstrate communicative competence before an audience. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, oral presentations carry even greater significance because they reflect not only linguistic proficiency but also pragmatic ability and self-confidence in real-life communication. Despite their pedagogical importance, oral presentations often provoke high levels of apprehension among EFL learners. Many students experience nervousness, fear of mistakes, and cognitive blockage when speaking in front of an audience, leading to reduced fluency, avoidance behaviour, or unwillingness to participate. Consequently, what should serve as a developmental opportunity frequently becomes an anxiety-inducing task that undermines learning outcomes.

Language learning involves not only cognitive processes but also affective variables that strongly influence performance. Researchers such as Krashen (1982) and Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) established that emotional states—particularly anxiety—play a decisive role in language acquisition and use. Anxiety manifests physiologically through trembling, sweating, or increased heartbeat, and cognitively through mental blocks and forgetfulness. Horwitz et al. (1986) conceptualized foreign language anxiety (FLA) as a situation-specific construct composed of communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. These elements converge most intensely during oral presentations, where students must perform under public scrutiny while maintaining linguistic accuracy. When anxiety levels rise, learners' cognitive resources are diverted toward self-monitoring and

error avoidance, restricting access to their linguistic knowledge and impairing performance (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

In Saudi Arabia, oral presentation anxiety is intensified by sociocultural and educational factors. English occupies a prominent position in higher education and employment, yet opportunities for authentic communication outside the classroom remain limited. For many students, oral presentations constitute one of the few occasions requiring extended English speech before an audience. This limited exposure amplifies stress, as performance becomes a reflection of competence and self-worth. Cultural norms that emphasize correctness and modesty in public behaviour can further heighten self-consciousness, especially among female learners, who often internalize greater pressure to avoid public errors or embarrassment (Al-Saraj, 2014). As a result, even students with strong written or receptive skills may struggle to speak fluently or confidently in presentation settings.

The relationship between anxiety and oral performance has been documented across global EFL contexts. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) demonstrated that anxiety disrupts lexical retrieval and fluency, producing a cyclical relationship in which fear of failure reduces performance, and poor performance reinforces fear. Liu and Jackson (2008) reported that anxiety frequently leads to speech avoidance, reduced participation, and negative self-perception among Chinese learners. Similarly, Tanveer (2007) found that perceived linguistic inadequacy and fear of evaluation are the strongest predictors of presentation anxiety. These studies confirm that affective variables, particularly anxiety, are not mere by-products of limited competence but independent psychological constructs that can hinder otherwise capable learners.

The theoretical foundations of this relationship draw from several complementary frameworks. Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of communicative competence, emphasizing that language proficiency involves not only grammatical accuracy but also sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic dimensions. Canale and Swain (1980) further refined these into four interrelated components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. Oral presentations test each of these components simultaneously, requiring accurate language, audience awareness, and adaptability. However, as Hedge (2000) and Nakatani (2006) noted, many EFL learners possess grammatical competence but lack the strategic and discourse competence necessary for extended, monologic tasks such as presentations. When anxiety interferes with these competencies, learners may fail to display their actual communicative potential.

Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis adds a psychological dimension by positing that variables such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety act as filters that either facilitate or block language input and output. When the affective filter is high due to tension or fear, learners cannot effectively process or retrieve language, leading to disfluency or silence. Empirical studies (Young, 1991; MacIntyre, 1995; Arnold, 2011) support this model, showing that learners who experience anxiety exhibit lower fluency and less spontaneous interaction. However, subsequent work by Scovel (1978) and Dörnyei (2009) conceptualized affect as dynamic rather than static, fluctuating according to context, task, and interpersonal conditions. Oral presentation anxiety exemplifies this dynamic pattern: anxiety tends to peak before and during delivery, decrease after positive feedback, and re-emerge before subsequent performances. Wu (2024) observed that repeated practice and familiarity with the audience can lower anxiety levels over time, reinforcing the need for pedagogical environments that address emotional as well as linguistic preparation.

Horwitz et al.'s (1986) theory of Foreign Language Anxiety provides a more targeted explanation of the relationship between emotion and language use. Their Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) remains one of the most widely applied instruments for measuring FLA. Subsequent studies (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Park & French, 2013)

confirmed that high anxiety correlates negatively with oral proficiency and self-reported communicative confidence. Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert (1999) later differentiated between general FLA and skill-specific forms such as speaking and writing anxiety, showing that speaking anxiety is the most severe because it involves real-time performance and public exposure. Oral presentations, which combine these conditions with formal evaluation, thus represent the highest-pressure context for EFL learners.

From a motivational perspective, Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) adds further explanatory power. It posits that motivation and performance improve when three psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, are satisfied. In oral presentation tasks, autonomy corresponds to control over topic selection and presentation style; competence refers to linguistic mastery and rehearsal; and relatedness reflects supportive relationships with teachers and peers. Research by Noels (2001) and Ushioda (2011) shows that when students experience autonomy and supportive feedback, their anxiety decreases and engagement increases. Integrating SDT with affective and communicative theories thus provides a comprehensive framework for understanding oral presentation anxiety as both a psychological and pedagogical phenomenon.

Empirical studies across cultures have consistently validated the negative effects of FLA on oral performance. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) and Horwitz (2001) demonstrated that anxiety impairs not only vocabulary recall but also sentence formulation and discourse management. Liu and Jackson (2008) found that anxious learners exhibit both physiological reactions and cognitive interference during public speaking. While Scovel (1978) distinguished between facilitative and debilitating anxiety, the evaluative nature of oral presentations tends to evoke the latter, inhibiting rather than motivating learners. Cross-cultural investigations have also revealed contextual differences: Tóth (2010) found that Hungarian learners felt pressured to produce error-free speech due to perfectionist norms, whereas Awan et al. (2010) reported that collectivist cultures amplify fear of negative evaluation. These findings suggest that FLA is universal but shaped by sociocultural expectations, an observation particularly relevant in Saudi Arabia where emphasis on public correctness and respect for authority can heighten self-monitoring and anxiety.

Focusing more narrowly on oral presentation tasks, Wu (2024) identified that learners' anxiety peaks during delivery rather than preparation, emphasizing the role of immediate audience evaluation. Tanveer (2007) likewise found that linguistic insecurity and fear of judgment strongly predict presentation anxiety, even among students who prepare extensively. Li and Peng (2018) demonstrated that reflective video-based training helps students identify anxiety triggers and improve self-regulation, while Cinkara (2016) reported that video-stimulated recall raised learners' awareness of affective barriers and reduced classroom tension. MacIntyre and Thivierge (1995) further showed that audience familiarity influences anxiety levels, though the effect varies with individual personality and context. Barrett et al. (2023) expanded this line of inquiry to virtual environments, showing that audience familiarity may reduce or increase anxiety depending on the learner's comfort with technology and public exposure. These studies collectively affirm that oral presentation anxiety is multidimensional, encompassing linguistic, psychological, and situational elements that interact dynamically during performance.

In the Gulf region, empirical work has reinforced similar trends. Al-Nouh, Abdul-Kareem, and Taqi (2015) surveyed 500 Kuwaiti EFL learners and found that lexical recall, grammar accuracy, and fluency difficulties were primary anxiety sources. Students who doubted their linguistic competence reported higher anxiety and weaker delivery. Al Jahromi (2020) found comparable patterns among Bahraini students, noting that limited access to feedback and training heightened nervousness, whereas structured peer and teacher feedback

improved confidence and fluency. Both studies highlighted how regional EFL curricula often prioritize writing over speaking, leaving learners underprepared for oral tasks.

In Saudi Arabia, growing research attention has been directed toward language anxiety and oral performance, though most studies examine general speaking rather than formal presentations. Alrabai (2014) reported that communication apprehension and fear of evaluation are widespread across Saudi classrooms, often leading to avoidance of voluntary participation. Al-Saraj (2014) emphasized the role of classroom environment, arguing that pedagogies focused on correctness rather than communication exacerbate anxiety. Alharbi (2021) observed that students frequently rely on scripts or skip presentations entirely as avoidance strategies. Alrabai (2016) later demonstrated that learner-centered instruction, autonomy in topic choice, and collaborative activities can substantially reduce anxiety and enhance communicative confidence. These findings underscore the necessity of reforming teaching practices to balance linguistic accuracy with psychological support.

Despite these contributions, significant gaps remain. Most Saudi studies address general speaking anxiety rather than the unique conditions of formal presentations, which require sustained discourse, audience interaction, and evaluative composure. Few investigations have explored anxiety among female learners, whose experiences are shaped by distinct sociocultural expectations. Moreover, limited attention has been paid to how psychological readiness interacts with linguistic competence and preparation to determine oral performance outcomes. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing teaching practices that respond to learners' affective needs while strengthening communicative competence. Accordingly, the present study examines the role of anxiety in oral presentation performance among female EFL students at King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia. It focuses on four interrelated dimensions of anxiety (psychological, linguistic, situational, and preparation-related) and investigates how each affects learners' confidence and delivery. The study aims to: (1) identify the main sources of anxiety experienced during oral presentations; (2) determine the relative impact of each dimension on performance; and (3) propose instructional strategies that mitigate anxiety and enhance communicative competence in Saudi higher education.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrated approach, combining affective, linguistic, and motivational theories to provide a multidimensional account of oral presentation anxiety. By focusing specifically on female EFL learners in a Saudi university, it adds a gender-sensitive and culturally contextual perspective to existing literature dominated by general or mixed-gender studies. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and pedagogically: theoretically, by extending the application of Krashen's, Horwitz's, and Deci and Ryan's models to the under-researched domain of oral presentation tasks; and practically, by informing anxiety-reduction strategies, reflective training, and supportive classroom practices that promote psychological readiness alongside linguistic competence.

Through this combined focus on affective and communicative variables, the study seeks to deepen understanding of how anxiety influences oral performance and to offer evidence-based recommendations for EFL curriculum development in Saudi higher education. The following section outlines the methodological design adopted to investigate these relationships.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design and Participants**

A quantitative descriptive approach was employed through a structured questionnaire administered to thirty undergraduate female students enrolled in the Department of English at KKU. Quantitative analysis was suitable for identifying patterns and tendencies related to affective variables such as anxiety, which are best assessed through measurable indicators. The

design was cross-sectional, collecting data within one academic term to capture students' current attitudes and experiences toward oral presentations.

All participants were native Arabic speakers aged between 18 and 22 years, representing the typical undergraduate population in Saudi higher education. They possessed at least intermediate proficiency in English and had prior experience delivering oral presentations as part of their coursework. Selection was based on convenience sampling, which, although limited in scope, allowed practical access to an appropriate cohort of EFL learners.

Before data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured that participation was voluntary, and advised that they could withdraw at any point without consequence. No identifying information was requested, and confidentiality was guaranteed to encourage honest and reflective responses, particularly on sensitive issues such as nervousness and self-confidence.

### **Instrumentation**

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure four interrelated dimensions of oral presentation anxiety:

1. Psychological factors such as shyness, nervousness, and fear of mistakes.
2. Linguistic factors such as difficulty recalling vocabulary, grammatical uncertainty, and lack of fluency.
3. Situational factors such as audience size, evaluative pressure, and classroom environment.
4. Preparation-related factors such as rehearsal habits, organization, and topic familiarity.

The questionnaire contained 20 items rated on a four-point Likert scale from *Strongly Agree* (4) to *Strongly Disagree* (1), excluding a neutral midpoint to elicit more decisive responses. Example items include:

- "I feel anxious when delivering an oral presentation in English."
- "I worry about making grammatical or pronunciation mistakes."
- "I feel more confident when I have rehearsed my presentation several times."
- "I tend to forget vocabulary when presenting before an audience."

The instrument was adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) and refined to address presentation-specific contexts based on research by Al-Nouh et al. (2015), Wu (2024), and Al-Saraj (2014). Three experts in applied linguistics and EFL pedagogy at KKU reviewed the questionnaire to ensure content validity and contextual appropriateness. Their feedback led to minor wording revisions for clarity and cultural relevance.

To ensure reliability, the instrument was pilot-tested with ten female students from a comparable academic background who were not part of the final sample. Feedback confirmed that all statements were clear and contextually suitable. Statistical reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.81, indicating high internal consistency and confirming that the instrument effectively measured the intended construct of oral presentation anxiety.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected in classrooms after obtaining approval from the department chair and course instructors. The researcher introduced the study, explained its purpose, and

emphasized voluntary participation and confidentiality. Participants completed the questionnaire individually in approximately 20 minutes, with the researcher present to clarify any questions without influencing responses.

A paper-based format was selected over an online survey to maximize accessibility and participation. This choice minimized technological barriers and created a supportive classroom environment conducive to focus and honesty. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately to ensure response accuracy and completeness.

### Data Analysis

Responses were coded and entered into SPSS for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were computed to identify patterns in participants' responses and to determine which factors contributed most to their reported anxiety levels.

The analysis followed the structure of the questionnaire's four domains:

1. Psychological dimension: examining emotional aspects such as fear of errors or evaluation.
2. Linguistic dimension: assessing how vocabulary, grammar, and fluency difficulties influenced anxiety.
3. Situational dimension: analyzing how audience size and evaluation pressure affected confidence.
4. Preparation dimension: evaluating the relationship between rehearsal and perceived readiness.

Composite mean scores were calculated for each category to enable comparison of their relative effects. The findings were later interpreted in relation to existing studies and theoretical models, including Foreign Language Anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986), Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, and Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

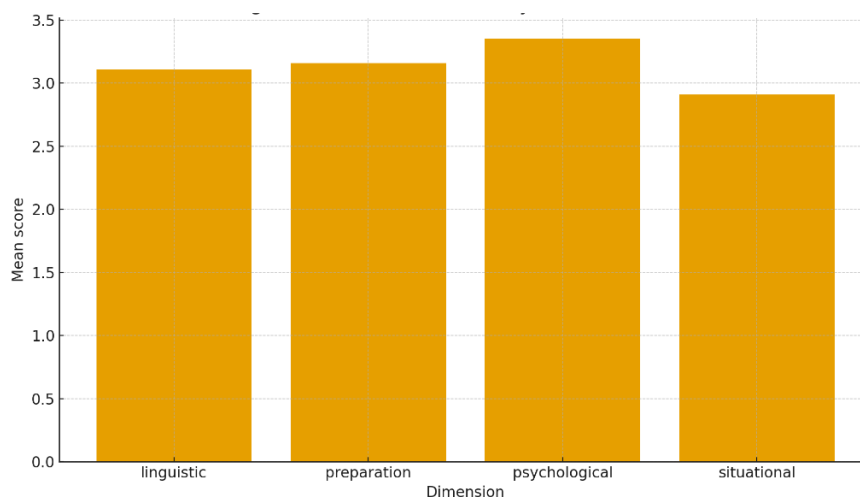
### Findings

Overall, the results indicate that oral presentation anxiety among participants is moderate to high across all four dimensions, with psychological factors emerging as the most dominant source of anxiety, followed by preparation, linguistic, and situational factors. The mean scores for each dimension are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics by Dimension**

Dimension	Number of Items	Mean	SD
Psychological	5	3.32	0.11
Linguistic	5	3.10	0.10
Situational	5	2.88	0.09
Preparation	5	3.15	0.08

The highest mean value ( $M = 3.32$ ) indicates that psychological elements such as fear, shyness, and nervousness are the strongest barriers to confident oral performance. In contrast, situational aspects, including audience size and evaluation settings, received the lowest mean score ( $M = 2.88$ ), although still within the anxiety range. Figure 1 shows a visual comparison of the mean scores across the four dimensions.



**Figure 1. Mean Likert Score by Dimension (1–4)**

### ***Psychological Factors***

The results show that the psychological dimension generated the strongest agreement among respondents, with 94% of participants selecting “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” for statements related to nervousness, fear of mistakes, and self-consciousness. The majority of students reported heightened tension before and during presentations, with typical reactions including rapid heartbeat, trembling, and mental blocks.

Among individual items, “I feel anxious when delivering an oral presentation in English” and “I worry about making pronunciation mistakes in front of others” received the highest means (3.6 and 3.5 respectively). These findings confirm that emotional stimulation and fear of negative evaluation play a significant role in oral performance.

Such high psychological scores align with Horwitz et al.’s (1986) concept of foreign language anxiety and Krashen’s (1982) affective filter hypothesis, which propose that anxiety acts as an internal barrier that disrupts cognitive processing and language output. The prevalence of these factors suggests that even well-prepared students experience performance inhibition when under observation.

### ***Linguistic Factors***

The linguistic dimension ranked third overall ( $M = 3.10$ ), indicating that challenges in vocabulary recall, grammar accuracy, and fluency remain significant contributors to anxiety. Approximately 82% of participants agreed that forgetting words during a presentation or being uncertain about grammar accuracy made them feel tense or distracted. Items such as “I forget English words while presenting” and “I feel anxious about my grammar when speaking in public” recorded mean scores of 3.3 and 3.2 respectively. Students also expressed discomfort with maintaining fluency under evaluative conditions, suggesting a link between linguistic insecurity and performance pressure.

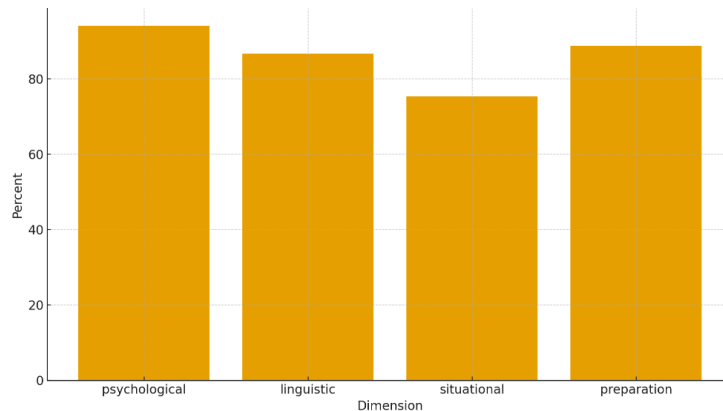
These findings are consistent with Al-Nouh et al. (2015) and Wu (2024), who found that linguistic inadequacy intensifies presentation anxiety, especially when EFL learners perceive themselves as being judged for errors. The results imply that linguistic competence alone does not eliminate anxiety unless reinforced by confidence-building activities and practice.

### ***Situational Factors***

Situational variables, though rated lower than psychological and linguistic ones, still reflect notable influence ( $M = 2.88$ ; 76% agreement). Participants reported increased stress when presenting before large audiences, strict evaluators, or unfamiliar groups. The item “I feel nervous when my teacher evaluates my presentation” scored the highest within this dimension

(M = 3.0), followed by “I find it harder to present in front of classmates I do not know well” (M = 2.9).

The lower overall mean indicates that while environmental factors matter, they are less central than emotional and linguistic ones. Nevertheless, the presence of audience- and context-related tension confirms MacIntyre and Gardner’s (1994) claim that anxiety arises from situational unpredictability and fear of evaluation. Figure 2 depicts the relative percentages of agreement across all dimensions, illustrating that even situational anxiety—though least dominant—affects more than three-quarters of participants.



**Figure 2. Percent Agreeing (3 or 4) by Dimension**

**Preparation-Related Factors**

Preparation-related elements ranked second overall (M = 3.15; 89% agreement), indicating that practice and organization strongly influence students’ sense of control. Statements such as “I feel confident when I have rehearsed my presentation several times” and “Good organization reduces my anxiety” scored above 3.3 on average. These findings suggest that students who invest time in structured rehearsal and planning experience less apprehension, aligning with Wallwork’s (2016) observations that preparation under simulated conditions improves delivery quality and reduces nervousness in non-native English speakers presenting at international conferences.

**Overall Patterns**

The descriptive results confirm that psychological anxiety is the dominant challenge for Saudi female EFL learners, followed by preparation quality, linguistic concerns, and situational conditions. High mean values across all categories demonstrate that oral presentations remain emotionally and cognitively demanding tasks in EFL classrooms. Table 2 provides a summary of the top ten items with the highest mean agreement.

**Table 2. Top Ten Items by Mean Agreement**

Item	Description (Abbreviated)	Mean	SD
Q1	I feel anxious when presenting in English	3.6	0.5
Q2	I worry about pronunciation mistakes	3.5	0.4
Q16	Rehearsal increases confidence	3.4	0.3
Q3	Fear of being judged	3.4	0.4
Q4	I feel shy speaking in public	3.3	0.4
Q17	Good organization lowers anxiety	3.3	0.3
Q8	Forgetting words causes stress	3.3	0.4
Q5	My hands shake during presentations	3.2	0.5
Q6	Grammar errors make me anxious	3.2	0.4
Q9	I speak less fluently when nervous	3.1	0.4

The data reveal a consistent pattern of high emotional reactivity, confirming that oral presentation tasks generate significant anxiety even among trained students. Psychological variables dominate all others, but effective preparation mitigates some effects. Linguistic insecurity and situational pressure remain contributing factors. These findings provide a quantitative foundation for identifying pedagogical interventions aimed at reducing anxiety and improving learners' oral performance confidence in EFL contexts.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study confirm that oral presentation anxiety is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that continues to affect EFL learners in higher education. Among the four dimensions investigated, psychological, linguistic, situational, and preparation-related, psychological factors emerged as the most influential. This predominance underscores the essential role of affective and emotional variables in shaping learners' communicative behavior and performance. The results align with existing research on foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994) while also extending it by focusing specifically on presentation tasks, a high-stakes genre often overlooked in broader classroom speaking studies.

### ***Psychological Factors and the Affective Dimension***

The high mean scores associated with psychological variables such as fear, nervousness, and self-consciousness reinforce the relevance of Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that emotional tension can inhibit language processing and output. The participants' descriptions of physiological and cognitive symptoms, rapid heartbeat, mental blocks, and trembling, indicate that anxiety operates as a barrier that directly interferes with linguistic recall and fluent speech production.

These findings parallel those of Horwitz et al. (1986) and Arabai (2014), who demonstrated that emotional apprehension significantly reduces oral performance in EFL contexts. However, the present study advances this discussion by highlighting how the evaluative context of an oral presentation magnifies the effect of these emotional constraints. Unlike general classroom participation, presentations require sustained attention, structured discourse, and visible composure before peers and instructors. The fear of making errors in such settings intensifies self-consciousness, producing a strong affective filter that restricts access to linguistic competence.

This suggests that effective instruction in EFL classrooms must move beyond linguistic accuracy and incorporate explicit affective management strategies, such as anxiety awareness activities, supportive feedback, and gradual exposure to audience interaction. Doing so addresses the psychological roots of performance inhibition rather than treating anxiety as a by-product of limited proficiency.

### ***Linguistic Challenges and Cognitive Overload***

Linguistic insecurity was the third-ranked dimension, yet its influence cannot be understated. Participants reported frequent difficulty recalling vocabulary, maintaining grammatical accuracy, and sustaining fluency when under evaluative pressure. This echoes findings from Al-Nouh et al. (2015) and Wu (2024), who observed that linguistic shortcomings amplify presentation anxiety, particularly when students fear being judged for errors.

However, the results from this study also demonstrate that linguistic difficulty interacts dynamically with psychological anxiety. Rather than functioning as an isolated cause, linguistic strain contributes to a cycle of tension: anxiety leads to reduced cognitive control, which in turn produces more linguistic errors and further intensifies anxiety. This aligns

with MacIntyre and Gardner's (1994) model, which emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between affective and cognitive systems in second-language performance.

The implication for EFL pedagogy is that linguistic training should not be separated from confidence-building. Integrating task-based rehearsal, fluency-focused exercises, and peer collaboration can help learners develop automaticity in language use, reducing cognitive load during public speaking. Emphasizing meaning-focused practice rather than error avoidance can also help lower the affective filter and improve spontaneous communication.

### ***Situational Contexts and Cultural Sensitivity***

Although situational factors scored lowest in terms of mean anxiety, their relevance remains significant. Many participants expressed discomfort presenting before strict evaluators or unfamiliar audiences, demonstrating that classroom climate and assessment culture shape learners' affective responses. This supports MacIntyre and Gardner's (1991) observation that situational unpredictability triggers anxiety through perceived loss of control.

Within the Saudi EFL context, public speaking is often linked to broader social expectations about modesty, formality, and public decorum. Such expectations can heighten students' self-awareness, especially during performances that demand linguistic accuracy and composure. The findings therefore underline the importance of culturally sensitive pedagogical practices that recognize students' comfort boundaries while still encouraging active participation. Providing students with the opportunity to rehearse in smaller, supportive groups before presenting to larger audiences may help reduce situational tension. Additionally, adopting formative assessment methods, emphasizing improvement and effort rather than penalty for errors, can create a more relaxed atmosphere that promotes authentic communication.

### ***Preparation and Self-Efficacy***

The study's second-highest scores were associated with preparation-related factors, confirming that structured rehearsal and familiarity with presentation content improve confidence and reduce anxiety. These findings align closely with Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT), particularly the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When learners feel prepared and perceive mastery over their material, they experience higher competence, which strengthens motivation and self-efficacy.

Participants who engaged in consistent rehearsal and content organization reported reduced nervousness and greater composure. However, some noted that excessive memorization increased anxiety, particularly when they forgot rehearsed lines. This distinction suggests that preparation should emphasize understanding and flexibility rather than rote performance. Encouraging students to internalize ideas and adapt language spontaneously fosters communicative confidence and aligns with the strategic competence dimension of Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence.

Thus, preparation serves not only a practical function but also a psychological one, reinforcing learners' belief in their ability to perform effectively. Educators can capitalize on this by incorporating structured rehearsal schedules, simulated presentations, and peer feedback sessions that build procedural familiarity and confidence.

### ***Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications***

By integrating findings across the four dimensions, this study substantiates the view that oral presentation anxiety results from the interaction between affective, linguistic, and situational variables rather than any single cause. It also expands the theoretical scope of existing models by situating these variables within a culturally specific higher education context.

The data support the theoretical proposition that the affective filter operates dynamically in real-time performance: heightened anxiety restricts access to communicative competence, while improved preparation and emotional regulation lower the filter and enhance output. In addition, the findings provide empirical support for Self-Determination Theory, demonstrating that autonomy and competence, achieved through topic choice and rehearsal, directly contribute to reduced anxiety and improved engagement.

From a pedagogical perspective, this research reinforces the necessity of holistic instruction in EFL programs. Teachers should:

1. Combine language instruction with explicit strategies for managing public speaking anxiety.
2. Create supportive classroom environments that balance evaluation with encouragement.
3. Integrate structured rehearsal and feedback cycles into the curriculum.
4. Use peer collaboration to normalize errors and promote shared learning.

These recommendations collectively align with the communicative competence framework, which views language use as both a cognitive and social process.

### ***Contribution and Significance of the Study***

This research advances current understanding in three keyways. First, it focuses explicitly on oral presentation anxiety rather than general speaking anxiety, addressing a neglected but pedagogically critical task type in EFL education. Second, it examines this phenomenon among Saudi female university students, providing valuable insights into how sociocultural expectations intersect with linguistic and psychological variables. Third, it empirically integrates multiple theoretical perspectives, Communicative Competence, Foreign Language Anxiety, the Affective Filter, and Self-Determination Theory, demonstrating how these frameworks collectively explain the multidimensional nature of performance anxiety.

The study contributes to both theory and practice by offering evidence-based implications for designing anxiety-sensitive pedagogical strategies. It highlights that reducing anxiety requires more than language proficiency; it demands a balanced approach that addresses emotional readiness, classroom climate, and learner autonomy.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined the factors contributing to oral presentation anxiety among female EFL students at King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia, focusing on four key dimensions: psychological, linguistic, situational, and preparation-related. The findings demonstrate that anxiety during oral presentations is not a single-dimensional issue but an interplay of emotional, linguistic, and environmental variables. Psychological factors emerged as the dominant cause, with students reporting intense nervousness, fear of mistakes, and self-consciousness when speaking before evaluative audiences. Preparation-related factors ranked second, indicating that structured rehearsal, organization, and familiarity with content considerably enhance confidence and reduce anxiety. Linguistic difficulties, including vocabulary recall and grammar accuracy, were significant but secondary sources of stress, while situational factors such as audience composition and assessment context exerted a moderate influence.

These results reinforce theoretical perspectives from Horwitz et al. (1986) on Foreign Language Anxiety, Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, and Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, collectively highlighting that anxiety restricts communicative competence by blocking linguistic access and reducing motivation. The

findings extend earlier research by applying these frameworks specifically to the oral presentation genre, a context demanding extended discourse, visible performance, and evaluation under pressure.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the results point to the need for holistic EFL instruction that integrates language proficiency development with affective and psychological support. Teachers should adopt anxiety-reduction techniques such as gradual exposure to public speaking, collaborative rehearsal activities, and constructive feedback focused on progress rather than errors. Introducing task-based and meaning-focused activities can help students shift attention from linguistic form to communicative purpose, thereby lowering anxiety and enhancing fluency. Institutional policies should also recognize the emotional dimensions of language learning, encouraging classroom environments that promote confidence and self-efficacy.

Although this study provides valuable insight into anxiety patterns among Saudi female EFL learners, future research should expand the participant base to include a broader range of institutions and proficiency levels. A mixed-methods design, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews or classroom observations, would offer a richer understanding of how students experience and cope with presentation anxiety. Further investigation into the long-term effects of training interventions, such as systematic rehearsal programs, peer evaluation systems, or mindfulness-based strategies, could reveal practical models for anxiety reduction applicable across EFL contexts.

In conclusion, the study underscores that improving learners' oral performance requires attention not only to language accuracy but also to psychological readiness and emotional resilience. Recognizing and addressing the multifaceted nature of oral presentation anxiety can help educators cultivate more confident, expressive, and capable communicators, an essential goal in advancing both language education and students' academic success.

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