

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a brief explanation of public speaking and anxiety in EFL context, the ecological theory, and study of the relevant research that supports the study. This theory aims to examine the three factors contributing to public speaking anxiety. By focusing on how these factors contribute to students' public speaking anxiety, the review will integrate studies on public speaking anxiety in both online and offline. This review will discuss three main points, such as: public speaking and anxiety in EFL context, ecological theory and previous studies on public speaking anxiety in higher education context.

A. Public Speaking and Anxiety in EFL Context

1. Public Speaking in EFL Contexts

Public speaking is a communicative skill that serves as a fundamental tool for information exchange and a significant academic challenge for language learners. One form of public speaking is delivering a structured speech to an audience for a specific purpose such as informing, persuading, or entertaining (Lucas, 2019). This naturally demands a high level of rhetorical and communicative competence. In the global academic context, mastery of public speaking is no longer merely an optional asset but a core academic requirement that determines students' scholarly engagement and professional readiness (Morreale et al., 2016). Consequently, higher education institutions are increasingly integrating formal presentations into their curricula, elevating the status of public speaking from a classroom exercise to a high-stakes performance event.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), public speaking involves more than just superficial language use. It demands complex cognitive processing, heightened audience awareness, and direct social interaction under intense pressure. For EFL learners, public speaking simultaneously serves as rigorous language practice and a demanding social performance. According to El Mortaji (2018), engaging in public speaking improves linguistic fluency, vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation accuracy, and audience-oriented communication strategies. Furthermore, it forces learners to actively synthesize

their grammatical knowledge with strategic competence, which can foster greater communicative autonomy over time (Woodrow, 2015).

However, the simultaneous demands of managing language accuracy and delivering successful delivery often create a significant psychological burden. The pressure to speak accurately, fluently, and appropriately in a foreign language often transforms public speaking from a developmental tool into a major source of stress and anxiety for learners (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). This anxiety is further exacerbated when students are required to deliver complex, research-based content, where they must overcome not only their language limitations but also fears of intellectual failure and negative social evaluation (King, 2014). Consequently, the interplay between cognitive overload and emotional anxiety continues to threaten EFL students' communicative performance and academic well-being.

2. Types of Public Speaking

In the academic landscape of language education, public speaking is not a uniform practice; rather, it manifests in a variety of different forms depending on the speaker's communicative intent, structural constraints, and target audience. Understanding this variation is crucial for evaluating how students navigate their performances and why certain speaking formats elicit higher levels of psychological anxiety than others (Beebe & Beebe, 2015). For EFL learners, different types of public speaking impose different cognitive loads and linguistic demands, shifting the focus from simple mechanical delivery to complex rhetorical navigation. According to DeVito (2019), public speaking can be categorized into four main types based on their primary purpose.

a. Informative Speaking

This type of public speaking is designed to educate the audience about a specific topic. The speaker's primary goal is to enhance the audience's understanding through clear explanation, factual data, and logical organization. Examples include academic presentations, lectures, and research dissemination in conferences. Informative speeches require the speaker to be knowledgeable and precise while avoiding persuasion.

b. Persuasive Speaking

The goal of persuasive speaking is to convince the audience to accept a particular viewpoint or take specific action. This form of speaking often uses rhetorical strategies, emotional appeals, and logical arguments. It is frequently found in debates, public campaigns, and advocacy speeches. In EFL classrooms, students are often required to deliver persuasive speeches during final assessments.

c. Demonstrative Speaking

This type aims to show the audience how to perform a task or process. It involves both verbal explanation and physical demonstration, often supported by visual aids. For example, a student might demonstrate how to use a language learning application or how to conduct a classroom activity.

d. Special Occasion Speaking

These speeches are usually delivered in ceremonial contexts and are meant to celebrate, commemorate, or honor a person, event, or idea. Examples include wedding toasts, graduation speeches, and award acceptances. In academic settings, this type may be practiced during simulations or formal events.

In the context of this study, the types of public speaking experienced by participants do not stand alone; rather, they occur at complex hybrid intersections within the university curriculum. The in-person Public Speaking course primarily challenges students through an individualized, persuasive, and informative format on a physical stage, where anxiety is triggered by direct proximity to the audience. In contrast, the EIECIE international program which integrates Academic Listening and Speaking with Academic Reading and Writing demands a sophisticated blend of informative and persuasive speaking in a digital environment. Here, students are not simply sharing general information; they are defending their own scientific data to a global audience. The transition from basic classroom speaking to advanced research presentations creates significant cognitive and technological load, changing how anxiety is triggered at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

Ultimately, recognition of different types of public speaking suggests that anxiety is strongly influenced by the specific communicative task at hand. While standard informative or demonstrative tasks allow for a predictable structure, the high-stakes requirement to present and defend research-based content to an

international audience amplifies students' fear of negative evaluation (King, 2014). Consequently, the psychological stress experienced by EFL learners is not only caused by the act of speaking itself, but also by how specific types of speaking tasks interact with the environmental demands of both the physical and virtual classrooms.

3. Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA)

Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) is defined as “a social anxiety involving fear of speaking in front of an audience” (Bartholomay & Houlihan, 2016, p. 211). It may include physiological symptoms such as trembling hands, increased heart rate, dry mouth, and blanking out, as well as cognitive symptoms such as negative self-talk and mental blocks (Raja, 2017). PSA is considered one of the most common specific communication fears and has been shown to impact both academic performance and students' willingness to speak in class (Dwyer & Davidson, 2021).

4. Public Speaking Anxiety in Online and Offline Contexts

The background of this research is based on two core academic pathways that present students with distinct experiences of anxiety. First, the Public Speaking course, conducted in an offline setting, serves as an arena where students face direct physical challenges. In this context, the learning environment demands a physical presence where the audience's gaze and immediate reactions are the primary triggers of anxiety. Students often experience a heightened fear of negative evaluation (Netta et al., 2020) because there is no "barrier" between the speaker and the audience, making every small gesture and mistake feel significantly more exposed on a real stage.

Second, the transition to a more complex academic challenge occurs through the integration of the Academic Listening and Speaking and Academic Reading and Writing courses. These two courses culminate in a high-stakes final assignment: serving as a presenter in an international scientific program called EIECIE (EDSA International ELT Conference on International Education). Additionally, EDSA (English Department Students Association) is a student organization within the English Language Education program that aims to provide work programs that can support the improvement of human and academic resources in the department. In

this combined framework, students are not only required to master advanced oral communication but must also present their original scientific papers to a global audience. The shift from general "public speaking" to "presenting research" in this formal forum creates a heavy cognitive load. Students must balance the technical accuracy of their scientific data with persuasive rhetorical skills, which often triggers deep self-doubt regarding their professional credibility in an international academic landscape.

The differences in anxiety between online and offline contexts can be identified through several key aspects. In offline contexts, anxiety tends to be external and physical, triggered by the physical presence of the lecturer as an authority figure and the tangible energy of the audience on a physical stage. Conversely, in online contexts, anxiety is more internal and technological. Despite reduced physical exposure, students often feel stressed by technical issues such as signal stability or difficulty operating digital platform features (Ward, 2018). Furthermore, the feeling of being emotionally "disconnected" from the audience and the loss of real-time feedback often make students feel a loss of control over their performance, which paradoxically exacerbates anxiety levels compared to performing in person (Wibowo & Khairunas, 2020).

To clarify, although the online and offline performances use different mediums and tasks, they share the same academic context. Both are high-stakes final examinations in the English Education Department, designed to test students' formal speaking skills. The comparison between the offline public speaking class and the online EIECIE presentation is intentional. From an ecological perspective, this design allows the researcher to see how the same students handle the transition between two different environments (microsystems). In the physical classroom, their anxiety is mostly physical and social (fear of being watched). On the digital screen, their anxiety shifts into a technological and cognitive problem because they have to operate devices while defending their research data. Therefore, while both settings are formal university evaluations, their different formats provide the perfect comparison to see how different environments shape public speaking anxiety differently.

B. Theoretical Framework: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory

The ecological approach, founded by Bronfenbrenner in 1979, is a theoretical perspective in human development that focuses on the relationship between an individual's perspective and their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Moreover, Kasbi and Elahi (2017) argued that the speaking anxiety of EFL learners can be seen from an ecological perspective in light of the interaction between individual and their environment and uncover factors that contribute to speaking anxiety. Using this theory, the researcher will uncover the emergence of their public speaking anxiety in online and offline public speaking courses by determining factors causing EFL students' speaking anxiety from ecological perspectives in the classroom context to study the relation between the students as a personal perspective and their environment.

The use of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory in this study is essential because public speaking anxiety is not solely an internal emotional response it is shaped by the interplay of personal, social, and environmental factors. This theory enables a comprehensive exploration of how individual experiences (microsystem), social interactions and institutional support (mesosystem), and broader cultural values (macrosystem) influence students' anxiety when performing public speaking tasks. Unlike psychological models that isolate anxiety within the individual, the ecological approach captures the complexity of real-world classroom dynamics, making it highly relevant for investigating anxiety in both online and offline public speaking.

In Bronfenbrenner's theory, the ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structured. According to Kasbi and Elahi (2017), the nested structured or nested ecosystem model is an ecological model that looks into human development against a series of interrelated structures labeled ecosystems. The structures themselves will build a reciprocal and complex relationship, from the smallest to the biggest that influences each other. In the nested ecosystem model, there are four systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Basically, the microsystem represents the immediate environment where face-to-face experiences and physical or digital interactions take place. This layer is closely

connected through the mesosystem, which regulates the interconnections and transitions between two or more of these immediate environments. Ultimately, continuous pressure from the top down is provided by the macrosystem, the outermost layer that encompasses overarching cultural values, global academic standards, and institutional ideologies, which influences the dynamics of the entire system.

The researcher focused on the microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem because these ecological levels are the most relevant for understanding the factors that influence students' public speaking anxiety in both offline and online academic speaking contexts. The microsystem captures students' immediate interactions within the learning environment, the mesosystem explains how experiences across different social settings influence students' anxiety, and the macrosystem reflects broader cultural values and academic expectations that shape students' public speaking experiences. In contrast, the exosystem refers to settings in which students do not actively participate, such as institutional policies or administrative decisions, although these settings may indirectly influence their learning environment. Since this study aims to explore students' experiences of public speaking anxiety through their direct interactions with their ecological environments, the analysis focuses on the microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem. The picture of its structure can be seen in Figure 1.

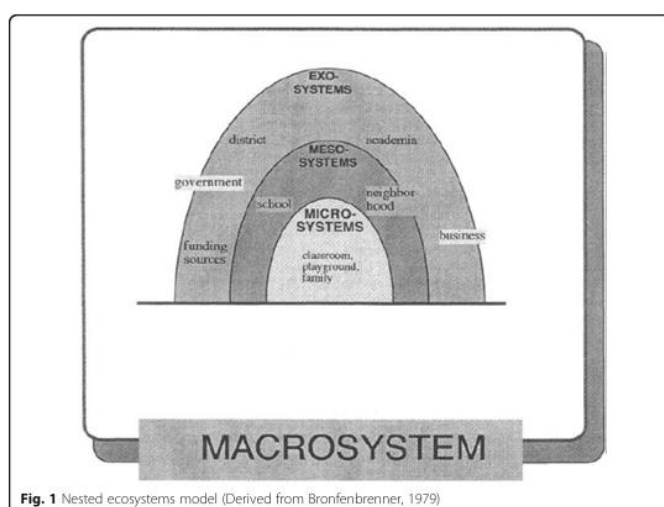


Figure 1. Nested Ecosystem Model

1. Microsystem

The innermost layer in the ecological approach is the microsystem. According to Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979, as cited in Kasbi & Elahi, 2017), the microsystem represents the immediate environment in which an individual directly interacts with others and experiences daily activities. In educational settings, the language classroom serves as a primary microsystem where individual and contextual factors interact and influence students' development. For instance, in a public speaking course, a student's anxiety may increase if the lecturer provides harsh criticism or if peers are unsupportive. Conversely, a supportive classroom atmosphere, constructive feedback, and clear instructions may help reduce anxiety and encourage students to perform better.

In the context of this study, the microsystem refers to the classroom environment and all forms of interaction that occur within it, including interactions between students, lecturers, learning materials, and classroom activities. The offline public speaking context in this research refers to the final examination of the Public Speaking course, where students were required to deliver a speech in front of an audience in a face-to-face classroom setting. Meanwhile, the online public speaking context refers to students' presentations delivered during the EIECIE conference, where presentations were conducted through digital platforms in a virtual environment. Although the delivery mode differs, both contexts still involve academic speaking performances that require students to present their ideas in front of an audience.

Therefore, in this study the microsystem aspect was used to explore factors contributing to students' public speaking anxiety within these immediate learning environments. These factors include students' previous speaking experiences, lecturer influence, learning materials, and classroom atmosphere. For example, learners who have previously experienced failure or embarrassment during class presentations may develop negative expectations and increased fear when speaking in front of others. On the other hand, students who have experienced successful speaking performances are more likely to develop confidence and manage anxiety more effectively in future speaking situations (Raja, 2017; Saghafi et al., 2017).

2. Mesosystem

The second layer after the microsystem is the mesosystem. According to Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979, as cited in Kasbi & Elahi, 2017), the mesosystem refers to the interactions between different environments that surround the individual beyond the immediate setting. In educational contexts, the mesosystem includes experiences and social interactions that occur outside the classroom but still influence students' learning behaviors and emotional responses. For example, students' previous experiences in speaking activities outside formal classroom settings may shape their confidence and anxiety when performing public speaking tasks. Saghafi et al. (2017) also noted that elements within the mesosystem may include students' past experiences and activities beyond the classroom environment that affect their academic performance. Although their research focused on writing anxiety, the concept can also be applied to public speaking anxiety, as students' external experiences may influence how they perceive and respond to speaking tasks in academic contexts.

In this study, the mesosystem refers to the broader social environments surrounding students outside the classroom context that may contribute to their public speaking anxiety. These environments may include interactions with peers from other classes or cohorts, audiences who are not directly part of the classroom community, as well as students' previous experiences in speaking activities outside the classroom. In the offline context, this may occur during the final examination of the Public Speaking course, where the audience may include students from other classes or unfamiliar participants beyond the regular classroom setting. Meanwhile, in the online context, students deliver their presentations during the EIECIE conference, where they present their work to a broader and potentially unfamiliar audience in a virtual academic environment. These external social interactions and experiences may influence students' confidence and contribute to the development of public speaking anxiety. Therefore, in this research, the mesosystem aspect is used to explore factors related to students' external environments that may influence their experiences of public speaking anxiety in both offline and online contexts.

3. Macrosystem

The outermost layer in the ecological approach is the macrosystem. According to Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), the macrosystem refers to the broader cultural, social, and institutional values that shape individuals' behaviors and perceptions within a society. This layer encompasses cultural norms, belief systems, social expectations, and ideologies that influence how individuals interpret their experiences within the microsystem and mesosystem. In educational contexts, the macrosystem may include cultural expectations about appropriate communication styles, social norms related to expressing opinions in public, and academic standards that shape how students are expected to perform in formal speaking situations. These broader values may influence how students perceive public speaking activities and how they regulate their emotions when speaking in front of others.

In this study, the macrosystem refers to the wider socio-cultural and academic influences that shape students' experiences of public speaking anxiety in both offline and online contexts. Cultural values related to politeness, modesty, and appropriate self-expression may affect how students present their ideas in public speaking situations. Additionally, academic expectations regarding formal presentations, particularly when presenting research-based content, may create additional pressure for students to perform effectively.

In the offline context, these influences may appear during the final examination of the Public Speaking course, where students are expected to demonstrate their speaking competence according to academic standards in a formal classroom setting. Meanwhile, in the online context, students present their work in the EIECIE conference, which requires them to communicate their research in a broader academic forum through digital platforms. In both contexts, cultural values and institutional expectations may shape students' perceptions of responsibility, appropriateness, and performance in public speaking, which in turn may contribute to the development of public speaking anxiety. Therefore, in this research, the macrosystem aspect is used to explore how broader socio-cultural and

institutional factors influence students' experiences of public speaking anxiety across both online and offline public speaking environments.

C. Study of the Relevant Research

Anxiety can be one of the potentials that impact students' speaking performance. Anxiety in the context of public speaking is characterized by a fear of performance that can lead to avoidance behaviors and physical symptoms caused by something threatening (Raja, 2017). Many studies discussed factors contributing to public speaking anxiety in higher education contexts, such as classroom, linguistic, psycholinguistic, and social evaluation.

Rafada and Madini (2017) researched to investigate factors contributing to public speaking anxiety in the classroom context. The study found that the leading causes of public speaking anxiety in the classroom context were the teacher's role of raising or reducing anxiety, communication apprehension, lack of vocabulary, fear of peer evaluation, giving a presentation in front of the whole class, the weak background in English, and fear from the test.

Moreover, Kalra and Siribud (2020) examined public speaking anxiety in the context of Thai EFL. One of the findings contributes to public speaking anxiety in a linguistic context. They reported that the first and foremost reason for speaking anxiety is the lack of competence in foreign language linguistic items, such as mispronunciation.

Thirdly, in terms of psycholinguistics, Rahman et al. (2024) reported that students at universities in Bangladesh tend to be anxious in a public speaking context. One of the findings is a factor contributing to public speaking anxiety in a psycholinguistic context. The factors are negative self-perception and linguistic fluency, which are the most common causes of fear of public speaking in English. Another study by Elmenfi and Gaibani (2016) explored the effect of social evaluation on Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) of EFL students at Omar Al-Mukhtar University. Students' anxiety during public speaking is driven by concerns about how they are socially perceived, fearing that the audience will focus on their appearance and behavior rather than their message. This fear of making mistakes and being judged negatively influences their performance. It shows that the social

evaluation factor is the most important motivating factor causing anxiety in the public speaking context.

From all aspects of factors contributing to public speaking anxiety, this study will investigate the differences between online and offline public speaking. This research is guided by ecological theory, which offers a critical perspective for investigating the element that contributes to public speaking anxiety in online and offline context.

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