

Peer-Supported Practice Strategy in Overcoming Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) Among Students

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effectiveness of the Peer-Supported Practice Strategy (PSPS) in reducing Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) among university students using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were gathered from 29 students enrolled in a Public Speaking course via pre- and post-test 12-item PSA questionnaires, followed by qualitative semi-structured interviews. A Paired-Sample T-Test revealed a statistically significant reduction in overall anxiety levels post-intervention ($t(28) = 3.342, p = .002$), with mean scores decreasing from 45.93 to 39.28. Additionally, an Independent-Sample T-Test indicated no significant difference in anxiety reduction between beginner ($n = 15$) and advanced ($n = 14$) learners ($p = .327$), confirming that PSPS benefited both groups equitably. Qualitative findings elaborated that PSPS served as an emotional buffer providing psychological safety for beginners, while acting as a constructive refining tool for advanced learners. Synthesizing these outcomes demonstrates that structured peer support effectively mitigates speech apprehension by fostering a supportive, low-stakes practice environment.

KEYWORDS

Mixed Methods; Peer-Supported Practice Strategy; Public Speaking Anxiety; Sequential Explanatory Design.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menguji efektivitas Peer-Supported Practice Strategy (PSPS) dalam mengurangi Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) pada mahasiswa menggunakan desain metode campuran eksplanatori sekuensial. Data kuantitatif dikumpulkan dari 29 mahasiswa kelas Public Speaking melalui kuesioner PSA 12 butir pada sesi pre-test dan post-test, yang dilanjutkan dengan wawancara semi-terstruktur secara kualitatif. Hasil uji Paired-Sample T-Test menunjukkan penurunan tingkat kecemasan secara signifikan setelah intervensi ($t(28) = 3,342; p = 0,002$), dengan rerata skor menurun dari 45,93 menjadi 39,28. Selain itu, uji Independent-Sample T-Test menunjukkan tidak ada perbedaan signifikan dalam penurunan kecemasan antara kelompok pemula ($n = 15$) dan mahir ($n = 14$) ($p = 0,327$), yang mengonfirmasi

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Metode Campuran; Peer-Supported Practice Strategy; Public Speaking Anxiety; Desain Eksplanatori Sekuensial.

bahwa PSPS memberikan manfaat yang setara bagi kedua kelompok. Temuan kualitatif memperjelas bahwa PSPS berfungsi sebagai penyangga emosional yang memberikan rasa aman psikologis bagi pemula, sekaligus menjadi sarana penyempurnaan keterampilan bagi tingkat mahir. Pengintegrasian temuan ini membuktikan bahwa latihan berbasis dukungan teman sejawat efektif meredakan kecemasan berbicara melalui lingkungan latihan yang suportif dan minim tekanan.

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INTRODUCTION

Not everyone possesses strong speaking skills, particularly when required to speak in front of an audience. Speaking in public can create psychological pressure and trigger anxiety, even among students who are linguistically capable of communicating in English. In educational settings, university students may understand the language and possess adequate speaking ability but still hesitate to participate in presentations, classroom discussions, or other speaking activities because they feel embarrassed, nervous, or afraid of being judged. This condition makes public speaking anxiety (PSA) an important issue in language learning and academic communication (Agus Subagyo, 2020; Hamama, 2023; Rengganawati, 2024).

Public speaking anxiety refers specifically to the anxiety experienced in situations in which an individual is expected to speak before or in front of an audience. It involves cognitive, emotional, physiological, and behavioral responses that may interfere with a speaker's ability to perform effectively. PSA should be distinguished from several related constructs that may contribute to or accompany anxiety in speaking situations. Communication apprehension refers more broadly to an individual's fear or anxiety associated with actual or anticipated communication with others, and therefore is not limited to public speaking situations. Fear of negative evaluation, meanwhile, refers to concerns about being judged unfavorably by others and may function as an important source of anxiety during public speaking. Test anxiety is specifically associated with evaluative situations involving examinations or tests and is therefore conceptually different from anxiety arising during presentations or public speaking activities. Although these constructs may overlap and influence one another, they should not be treated as interchangeable. In the context of the present study, PSA is understood as anxiety specifically associated with performing oral communication before an audience, while communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety are considered related but distinct psychological factors.

For students majoring in English, opportunities for interaction and oral communication are essential to language development. According to (Ellis, 2022), interaction is a discourse

co-constructed by the sender and receiver, through which meaningful linguistic input is produced. Consequently, anxiety during speaking activities can interfere not only with students' psychological well-being but also with their opportunities to practice and develop communicative competence. Students experiencing high levels of PSA tend to avoid presentations, participate less actively in discussions, and demonstrate reduced self-confidence (Erlita Khrisinta Dewi, 2022; Salsabila et al., 2023). If this problem remains unaddressed, it may negatively affect academic achievement and students' preparedness for professional environments in which effective oral communication is increasingly required.

Previous studies indicate that PSA remains a significant challenge for both beginning and advanced learners. However, the nature and sources of anxiety may differ according to students' levels of speaking proficiency. (Agustini Solihati et al., 2025) for example, identified differences in anxiety patterns between beginner and advanced students in Public Speaking courses. Beginners tended to experience higher anxiety because of vocabulary limitations and fear of ridicule, whereas advanced students experienced greater performance pressure associated with high expectations. Anxiety was manifested through physical symptoms, such as sweating and trembling, as well as behavioral responses, including avoidance and reduced participation. Fear of negative evaluation emerged as an important trigger across proficiency levels. These findings are consistent with (Akkakoson, 2016; Suciati, 2020), who reported that negative past experiences can intensify anxiety and subsequently affect speaking performance. Other studies have also found that gender and confidence do not necessarily produce highly significant differences in public speaking performance (Bunyamin et al., 2024; Fauziah et al., 2022). Taken together, these findings suggest that PSA is a multidimensional problem and that students with different levels of speaking proficiency may require different forms of support.

Various interventions have been employed to address speaking anxiety, including relaxation techniques, individual practice, pair work, and group activities. Collaborative approaches have received particular attention because they provide students with opportunities to practice speaking in less threatening environments. (Aliyu et al., 2019; Rianti et al., 2022), for instance, demonstrated that pair work and group presentations can reduce anxiety while improving students' speaking performance. In addition, research examining peer support has reported a significant negative relationship between peer support and public speaking anxiety among high school students in Islamic boarding schools, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = -0.358$ ($p < 0.01$). This finding indicates that greater peer support is associated with lower levels of anxiety. Nevertheless, these approaches have not always explicitly considered differences in students' speaking proficiency. Many previous interventions have applied collaborative activities to learners as a relatively homogeneous group, leaving limited understanding of how peer-supported practice may function for students with different proficiency levels.

One promising approach is the Peer-Supported Practice Strategy (PSPS), a speaking practice strategy in which students practice oral communication with the assistance, encouragement, observation, and feedback of their peers. The underlying principle of PSPS is that repeated speaking practice in a supportive peer environment can reduce the perceived threat of public performance while increasing opportunities for participation and constructive feedback. Peer support has been shown to be beneficial in reducing anxiety in university students and other contexts involving anxiety-related challenges (Yunanto et al., 2022). Similarly, (Lakshmi & Gopal Reddy, 2024) found that Peer-Assisted Learning can improve

students' oral presentation skills, particularly in English language learning contexts. Collaboration, peer observation, and peer feedback were identified as important components, although effective implementation requires appropriate planning and instructional support.

Evidence also suggests that peer-based approaches may contribute directly to anxiety reduction. (Zulfikar, 2022) reported that group work and selective error correction could reduce anxiety among university students, providing an operational basis for an adaptive and collaborative approach to speaking practice. Similarly, (Tauchid & Abdul, 2024) found that a peer-teaching intervention significantly reduced EFL students' speaking anxiety, with average anxiety scores decreasing from 64.23 to 54.44. These findings suggest that peer collaboration can reduce the pressure associated with individual performance, increase students' confidence, and help learners perceive mistakes as a natural component of language learning. Furthermore, classroom observations reported by (Agustini Solihati et al., 2025) showed the seriousness of the problem: among 32 students enrolled in a Public Speaking course, only two reported experiencing no anxiety when speaking in front of others.

Despite these findings, an important research gap remains. First, previous studies have demonstrated the relationship between peer support, collaborative learning, and speaking anxiety, but relatively few studies have examined a systematically structured peer-supported speaking practice strategy specifically designed to reduce PSA among university EFL learners. Second, existing studies tend to focus either on the general effectiveness of collaborative or peer-based activities or on differences in anxiety across proficiency levels, without sufficiently examining whether a peer-supported strategy produces different outcomes for students with different levels of speaking proficiency. Third, some studies emphasize speaking performance or general language anxiety rather than specifically examining PSA as the central outcome. Therefore, further research is needed to determine whether a structured peer-supported practice strategy can effectively reduce PSA and whether its effectiveness differs according to students' speaking proficiency.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating the effectiveness of the Peer-Supported Practice Strategy (PSPS) in reducing public speaking anxiety among university students learning English. In particular, the study examines changes in students' PSA before and after the implementation of PSPS and compares the effectiveness of the strategy across different levels of speaking proficiency. By focusing specifically on PSA while considering proficiency differences, this study seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of how peer-supported practice can be used as an adaptive strategy for addressing speaking anxiety. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically to the understanding of PSA and peer-supported learning and practically to the development of collaborative speaking practices that can create a safer, more supportive, and less anxiety-provoking environment for university EFL learners.

METHOD

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) and the overall effectiveness of the Peer-Supported Practice Strategy (PSPS). A sequential explanatory approach was selected because it allows the quantitative findings specifically measuring pre- and post-intervention anxiety levels to be systematically elaborated and contextualized by qualitative data. The initial quantitative phase evaluated

objective changes in PSA, while the subsequent qualitative phase explored students' subjective lived experiences through interviews, offering deeper insight into statistical trends and explaining the underlying psychological mechanisms of anxiety reduction.

The research involved 29 students ($N = 29$) enrolled in a Public Speaking course within a university classroom setting. Participants were categorized into two proficiency groups: beginners ($n = 15$) and advanced learners ($n = 14$). Categorization was established based on baseline pre-test PSA scores and prior public speaking course experience, allowing for a comparison of PSPS effectiveness across proficiency levels. The quantitative variables comprised the Peer-Supported Practice Strategy (PSPS) as the independent variable and Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) as the dependent variable. Meanwhile, the qualitative phase focused on students' perceptions of PSPS, their interactive practice experiences, and psychological changes regarding confidence development.

Data collection utilized both quantitative and qualitative instruments. Quantitative data were gathered using a 12-item PSA questionnaire scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*), administered during pre-test and post-test sessions. The questionnaire was adapted from McCroskey's (1970) Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) and contextualized to reflect peer-supported learning activities. The items assessed three core dimensions of anxiety: affective (emotional distress), physiological (physical reactions), and cognitive (fear of negative evaluation). Construct validity was established through expert judgment by two senior lecturers in English language education, while internal consistency reliability was confirmed via pilot testing, yielding a strong Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha = .84$). For qualitative data, a semi-structured interview protocol consisting of 4–6 open-ended questions was administered to selected student informants following the post-test to gather narratives regarding emotional comfort, key anxiety-reducing components, and overall confidence growth.

The research procedures were carried out across three sequential phases: quantitative data collection (pre-test administration, PSPS implementation, post-test administration, and statistical grouping), qualitative data collection (purposive informant sampling, semi-structured interviews, and qualitative data reduction), and integration (synthesizing statistical outcomes with qualitative student narratives). Statistical analyses were performed on the 29 participants using IBM SPSS. Descriptive statistics were computed to calculate mean anxiety levels before and after the intervention. A Paired-Sample T-Test was conducted at a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = .05$) to measure the overall statistical significance of anxiety reduction.

Additionally, an Independent-Sample T-Test was conducted on score differences ($\Delta = \text{Pre-test} - \text{Post-test}$) to examine variations in PSPS effectiveness between beginner ($n = 15$) and advanced learners ($n = 14$). Qualitative responses were analyzed using the interactive model by Miles and Huberman, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Finally, data integration was applied in the discussion section by cross-validating statistical results with student interview excerpts to explain why and how PSPS alleviated anxiety.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical outcomes of the study, structured into two parts: (1) the overall effectiveness of the Peer-Supported Practice Strategy (PSPS) in reducing Public

Speaking Anxiety (PSA), and (2) a comparative evaluation of anxiety reduction between beginner and advanced learners.

1. Overall Effectiveness of PSPS on Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA)

Descriptive analysis revealed a clear downward shift in students' Public Speaking Anxiety scores following the implementation of the PSPS intervention. The baseline pre-test mean anxiety score was $M = 45.93$ ($SD = 4.85$), which decreased to a post-test mean of $M = 39.28$ ($SD = 9.69$). On average, students experienced an anxiety score reduction of $\Delta = 6.66$ points ($SD = 10.72$).

Table 1. Paired Samples Statistics and Test Results for Pre- and Post-PSPS Intervention ($N = 29$)

Measurement	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference (Δ)	95% Confidence Interval	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-Test	29	45.93	4.85	6.66	[2.58, 10.73]	3.342	28	.002
Post-Test	29	39.28	9.69					

To verify whether this numerical decrease was statistically significant, a Paired-Sample T-Test was conducted at a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = .05$). As detailed in Table 1, the test yielded a statistically significant result, $t(28) = 3.342$, $p = .002$ ($p < .05$). Because the two-tailed p -value is well below the significance threshold, the null hypothesis is rejected. These statistical results confirm that the Peer-Supported Practice Strategy effectively reduced overall public speaking anxiety among the participants.

2. Comparison of PSPS Effectiveness: Beginners vs. Advanced Learners

To examine whether proficiency level influenced the magnitude of anxiety reduction, participants were categorized into beginners ($n = 15$) and advanced learners ($n = 14$). An Independent-Sample T-Test was performed on the gain/change scores ($\Delta = \text{Pre-test} - \text{Post-test}$).

Table 2. Group Statistics and Independent Samples Test across Proficiency Levels

Speaking Proficiency	<i>n</i>	Mean Difference (Δ)	Std. Deviation	Levene's <i>F</i> (Sig.)	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
Beginners	15	4.73	7.98	3.004 (.094)	-0.999	27	.327
Advanced	14	8.71	13.05				

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances satisfied the assumption of equal variances ($F = 3.004$, $p = .094$). The descriptive statistics indicate that advanced learners experienced a higher mean reduction in anxiety ($\Delta = 8.71$, $SD = 13.05$) compared to beginners ($\Delta = 4.73$, $SD = 7.98$). However, the Independent-Sample T-Test demonstrated that this difference was not statistically significant, $t(27) = -0.999$, $p = .327$ ($p > .05$). This indicates that

PSPS yielded comparable anxiety-reducing benefits across both proficiency groups without significant disparity.

The statistical findings of this study provide empirical proof of the efficacy of the Peer-Supported Practice Strategy (PSPS) in mitigating Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA). The significant reduction in anxiety scores ($p = .002$) demonstrates that structured, collaborative peer environments serve as an effective pedagogical intervention in oral communication courses.

Qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews further explain the underlying mechanisms driving this statistical decrease. Students reported that practicing speeches in small peer groups substantially lowered affective and physiological distress. In traditional performance setups, high anxiety often stems from fear of negative evaluation by instructors or large audiences. PSPS mitigates this pressure by establishing a low-stakes, non-judgmental practice space. As expressed by student informants, delivering speeches to peers first helped demystify the presentation process, allowing them to gain familiarity with their content and manage physiological symptoms (such as trembling or rapid heart rate) prior to final evaluation.

An interesting finding emerges from the post-test standard deviation ($SD = 9.69$), which expanded considerably compared to the pre-test ($SD = 4.85$). This widening variance indicates that while the overall trajectory of anxiety was downward, individual responses to peer support varied. The qualitative data elucidate this variance: students who actively engaged in mutual constructive feedback experienced sharp drops in anxiety, whereas those with deeply rooted trait-level apprehension required longer adaptation periods to feel completely comfortable around peers.

Regarding proficiency levels, the independent t-test revealed no statistically significant difference in anxiety reduction between beginner ($M = 4.73$) and advanced learners ($M = 8.71$, $p = .327$). Although advanced learners recorded a higher average drop, qualitative interview excerpts reveal that both groups benefited from PSPS through different functional mechanisms:

1. **For Beginners:** Peer support acted as an *emotional buffer*. Beginners noted that having a peer buddy provided psychological security and encouragement, making the prospect of speaking in public less intimidating ("I felt braver because a friend accompanied me").

For Advanced Learners: Peer support functioned as a *constructive refining tool*. Advanced students possessed basic delivery confidence but suffered from cognitive anxiety regarding performance precision. Practicing with peers allowed them to test speech delivery, receive immediate peer critique, and polish their presentation flow ("Practicing with peers helped me fix minor mistakes before the real presentation").

By synthesizing the quantitative outcomes (t -test metrics) with qualitative student narratives, this study illustrates that PSPS addresses both emotional reassurance for less experienced speakers and strategic refinement for more competent speakers. Consequently, PSPS proves to be a versatile, equitable, and effective instructional strategy for reducing speech apprehension in university-level public speaking classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Peer-Supported Practice Strategy (PSPS) is an effective instructional intervention for reducing Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) among university students. The quantitative findings reveal a statistically significant decrease in students' anxiety scores following the intervention ($t(28) = 3.342, p = .002$), confirming that structured, collaborative peer environments successfully alleviate speech apprehension. Furthermore, while advanced learners exhibited a numerically higher mean anxiety reduction compared to beginners, the Independent-Sample T-Test showed no statistically significant difference between the two proficiency groups ($p = .327$). This indicates that PSPS yields equitable benefits across varying skill levels.

The integration of qualitative interview data clarifies the underlying mechanisms of these statistical outcomes. PSPS functions adaptively depending on student proficiency: serving as an *emotional buffer* that provides psychological safety for beginner learners, and as a *constructive refining tool* that helps advanced learners manage performance-related cognitive anxiety. Overall, the sequential explanatory approach proves that peer-supported practice effectively bridges emotional support and skill development, making it a valuable pedagogical framework for public speaking instruction.

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