

# Building Confidence In Public Speaking For English-Majored Students At University Of Sciences, Thai Nguyen University, Viet Nam

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## Abstract:

In the realm of foreign language acquisition, speaking skills are considered paramount, heavily relying on students' self-confidence. In Vietnam, the pervasive effects of globalization and technological advancements have revolutionized teaching methodologies, fostering a learner-centered environment. This shift has increased opportunities for English learners to engage in public speaking and presentations. However, while some students excel in public speaking, others exhibit confusion and anxiety due to a lack of confidence. This study aims to explore students' perceptions of their confidence levels in public speaking and identify contributing factors and strategies to enhance this confidence. Utilizing a descriptive and quantitative research design, the study surveyed a hundred Vietnamese English-majored sophomores through a 32-item questionnaire assessing their public speaking confidence. The findings revealed that most students experience tension when dealing with public speaking tasks. Confidence levels were influenced by psychological, physiological, and curricular factors. The study suggested preparation and delivery strategies to bolster students' public speaking confidence.

**Keywords:** Public speaking, confidence, English-majored students, Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam

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## I. Introduction

English is undeniably an international language and is widely used across various fields such as science, technology, aviation, sports, and diplomacy. Additionally, it serves as the official language of numerous international organizations including ASEAN, WTO, and WHO. The global demand for English has surged due to the rapid spread of globalization and technological advancements. In Vietnam, the momentum for English language learning has increased significantly, driven by governmental policy changes and societal needs. English is now extensively taught in schools, universities, companies, and through various media such as radio, television, and the internet. Effective communication and confidence in public speaking are essential for integration and national development. However, many Vietnamese students have proved to lack confidence in communicating in English, missing opportunities due to self-expression issues. Observations at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences (TNUS) have revealed that while some students are confident in English presentations, many are not. This disparity necessitates a research to identify the causes and develop solutions for enhancing confidence in public speaking.

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the factors contributing to the level of public speaking confidence among English-majored students at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences (TNUS) when performing public speeches. Specifically, the study examined psychological, physical, and curriculum factors. Additionally, the research aimed to identify effective public speaking strategies that enhance confidence. The following are the research questions the writers tried to seek the answers:

1. What is the perception of the respondents regarding their level of confidence in public speaking?
2. What factors and strategies contribute to confidence in public speaking?

## II. Theoretical Background

Public speaking is the act of speaking to a group of people. The speech should be in a structured and deliberate manner, delivered with sincerity. Every public speaking speech usually will have a function, and it is whether intended to inform, influence or to entertain the audience. Confidence in public speaking is defined as the belief that the outcomes of one's effort will be successful (Simons, 2004). When students put effort into purposefully practicing their speeches and are knowledgeable about their content, they have reported higher feelings of confidence before engaging in public speaking (Combes, Walker, Harrell, & Tyler-Wood, 2008). It's admitted that Confidence is not innate or quickly acquired; even skilled speakers require notes and extensive

practice to master their presentations. Therefore, educators should allocate sufficient time for students to practice public speaking to enhance their confidence effectively.

Many EFL students lack confidence because of public speaking anxiety and negative views of self-esteem (Combes et al., 2008; Shafer, 2009). Anxiety may be brought on for a variety of different reasons, ranging from fear of excessive attention to feeling judged and receiving unsatisfactory reactions from audience members (Knight, Johnson, & Stewart, 2016). Dallimore, Hertenstein, and Platt (2008) studied public speaking lessons in classrooms where learner-center strategies were utilized and students were actively engaged and participated in informal classroom discussions. Students reported feeling more comfortable delivering speeches with engaging content and having informal practice in the classroom (Dallimore, et al., 2008). When teachers use learner-centered strategies, they are giving students the necessary opportunities to practice and reflect on their public speaking skills which will decrease students' anxiety and increase confidence (Price, 2009 as cited in Kimberly Kellam (2018). Therefore, when learner-centered strategies are used, students receive many opportunities to practice public speaking and receive feedback.

When it comes to the factors affecting students' public speaking performance and students' speaking problems, Park & Lee (2005) examined the relationships between second language learners' anxiety, self-confidence and speaking performance. The participants of their study were one hundred and thirty-two Korean college students who enrolled the English conversation classes. The results of their study indicated that learners' anxiety level was negatively related to their oral performance. Tanveer (2007) investigates the factors that cause language anxiety for twenty language learners in learning speaking skills and the influence of anxiety on communication in the target language and his result is similar to what Park & Lee (2005) figure out. The findings suggested that students' feeling of stress, anxiety or nervousness may impede their language learning and performance abilities. He cites that "the higher the anxiety, the lower the performance".

MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels (1998) studied the effects of self-confidence on oral performance. The results of their study showed that the learners' willingness to communicate was determined partly by their self-confidence. Park & Lee (2005) also examined the relationships between L2 learners' anxiety, self-confidence and oral performance. They reached a conclusion that self-confidence affected significantly on L2 learners' oral performance. They stated that if the learners were more confident, they would have better oral performance. So far, some coping strategies have been explored to reduce in-class presentation with minimum positive effects. For instance, peer assessment has been used to improve presentations as effective oral activities in the classroom because students play an active role in the learning process (Otoshi & Heffernen, 2008). However, this method neglects that speaking in front of other people is a source for L2 students' lack of confidence (MacIntyre, 1999). Assessed by classmates based on the foreign language speaking performance in front of their classmates and teacher, L2 students might regard presentations as extreme face-threatening activities that cause severe anxiety reactions. Although this method suggests improving presentations through the student-centered teaching strategy, its main focus still needs to be further enhanced because of the neglecting of L2 students' confidence problems, individual differences and culture.

### **III. Methodology**

This study was carried out at University of Sciences, Thai Nguyen University located in Thai Nguyen Province in the northeastern region of Vietnam. It adopted descriptive and quantitative research design, because descriptive and quantitative method describes characteristics of a population and allows explanation of a phenomenon being studied by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based method, particularly statistics (Aliaga and Gunderson, 2002 cited in Muijs, 2004). To gather data for the study, the researcher employed questionnaire survey. For the purpose of this study, the target population is the English-majored students at TNUS. The research was undertaken with the participation of 100 English-majored sophomores at TNUS when they were in the first semester of their academic year 2024-2025 at TNUS.

The research tool used in collecting information was unstructured survey questionnaire. It is composed of different aspects relating to confidence in public speaking namely anticipated problems, psychological factors, physiological factors, curriculum factors and common strategies, based from the practices provided by the gathered related articles.

The questionnaires consist of 32 questions which specify the research questions and variables of the study. The data was analyzed using sample testing for mean, standard deviation and variance, through data analysis tool pack of MS Excel. The results are then transformed into quantitative measurement and for clear understanding. Additionally, the results of the study are presented using tables and bar charts in order to present the final results to be complete and comprehensible.

Importantly, the level of interpretation in this study was significantly mentioned to various degrees of interpretation. The mean scores in perceptions toward the public speaking confidence was analyzed and demonstrated as follows.

Mean Range	Level of interpretation
01.00 – 01.80	Strongly disagree
01.81 – 02.60	Disagree
02.61 – 03.40	Undecided
03.41 – 04.20	Agree
04.21 – 05.00	Strongly agree

#### IV. Data Analysis And Discussion

As shown in Figure 1, 65% of the surveyed were not confident in their public speaking skill. Specifically, 17% of the students strongly agreed with the first statement “I am not confident in my public speaking skill”, while 48% agreed with the statement. Thus, the majority of them were found to be afraid of speaking in front of others, which is consistent with McCains’ (2012) results that showed that, “Nearly 90% of people reported feeling shy or uncomfortable speaking in front of others at some time in their lives” (p.1). However, this observation differs from person to person, as different people have different beliefs and confidence level for familiar and unfamiliar audiences.

**Figure 1: Student’s perception on confidence in their public speaking skill**

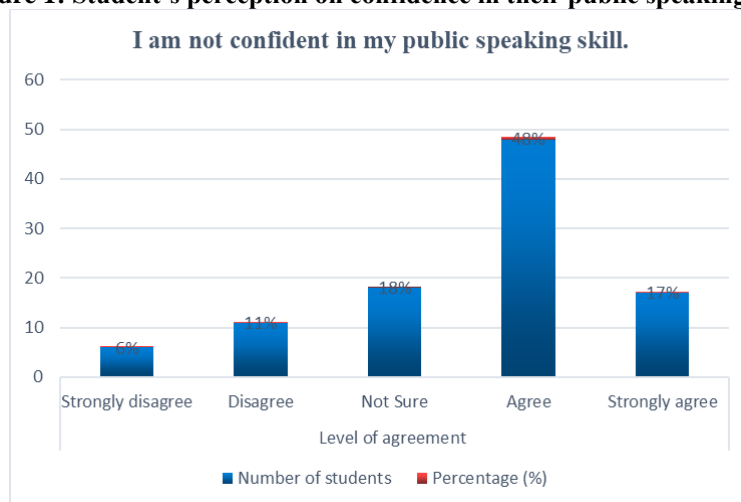
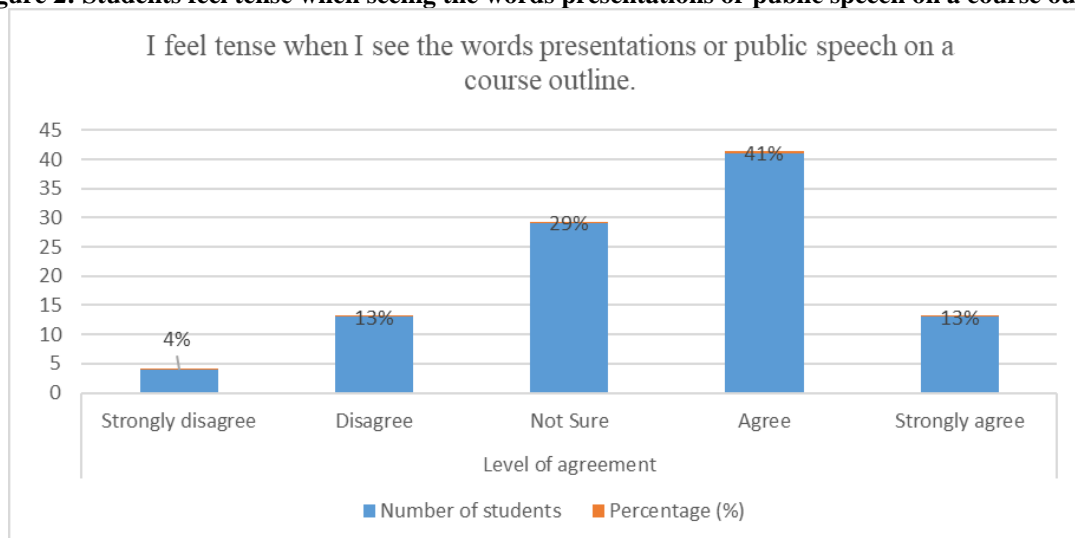


Figure 2 shows the large proportion of the students feel tense when seeing the words “presentations” or “public speech” on a course outline. This can be implied that the students fear in-class oral presentations or public speaking tasks. Whereas 41% of the participants agreed with the second statement in addition to 13% of the participants who responded “strongly agree”, 13% of them disagreed with the statement and only 4% chose “strongly disagree”.

**Figure 2: Students feel tense when seeing the words presentations or public speech on a course outline**



The lack of confidence in public speaking is confirmed with the responses of the third statement “When the teacher announces speaking assignments in class, I feel myself getting tense”. With the mean value of 3.4 and 67% of the surveyed agreed with the third statement, the students are facing with some difficulty in dealing with public speaking tasks even in the classroom environment.

In this study, the respondents were required to identify the influential factors contributing to level of confidence in public speaking among English-majored students at TNUS. These factors were divided into 3 categories: the psychological factors contributing to level of confidence in public speaking, the physiological factors affecting the level of confidence and the curriculum factors supporting the development of confidence.

The results revealed that the highest proportion from the respondents about level of confidence in public speaking was item 1 “While preparing to give a speech, I feel tense and nervous” (mean = 3.63, SD = 0.964), followed by item 2 “My thoughts become confused and jumped when I am giving a speech” (mean = 3.44) and, item 5 “When I made a mistake during giving a speech, I find it hard to concentrate on the parts that follow” (mean = 3.42). On the contrary, the least proportion of the respondents were item 3 “I am in constant fear of forgetting what I prepared to say.” (mean = 3.13), followed by item 6 “My mind is confused about the topic when giving the speech” (mean = 3.17) and item 4 “While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know” (mean = 3.28).

In terms of physiological factors, as can be seen from table 1 below, the highest proportion from the respondents about level of confidence in public speaking was “item 2” (mean = 3.45), followed by “item 3” (mean 3.41). On the contrary, the least proportion of the respondents were “item 4” (mean = 3.15), followed by “item 1” (mean = 3.11) respectively.

No	Physiological factors	Percentage					Mean	Ranking	Level of interpretation
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree			
Item 1	I perspire just before starting the speech.	9%	21%	25%	40%	5%	3.11	3	Not sure
Item 2	My hands tremble when I am giving a speech.	0%	22%	24%	41%	13%	3.45	1	Agree
Item 3	My heart beats very fast just as I start a speech.	3%	20%	22%	43%	12%	3.41	2	Agree
Item 4	I experience considerable discomfort while sitting in the room just before my speech starts.	5%	27%	22%	40%	6%	3.15	4	Not sure

**Table 1: The psychological factors affecting the level of confidence**

In the spoken communication rule, the golden ratio indicates that 55% of the communication process involves the language of the body when speaking, such as body posture, clothing, movement, etc. One can say that this is the highlight of an effective spoken communication. Through this aspect the speaker will create a good impact on the listener, as well as create the dialog more vibrant and attractive. Once the students can recognize and control their physiological factors, they can enhance their confidence to communicate exactly what messages they want to deliver.

Regarding curriculum factors, the results proved that the highest proportion from the respondents about level of confidence in public speaking was “item 3” (mean = 4.30), followed by “item 1” (mean = 4.28), and “item 2” (mean = 4.27). On the contrary, the least proportion of the respondents were “item 5” (mean = 3.93), followed by “item 4” (mean = 4.13).

No	Curriculum factors	Percentage					Mean	Ranking	Level of interpretation
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree			
Item 1	I spend time practicing my public speaking outside the classroom.	0%	5%	10%	37%	48%	4,28	2	Agree
Item 2	I need more guided practice with my public speaking.	0%	5%	10%	38%	47%	4,27	3	Agree
Item 3	I think teachers have an important role to find effective strategies to	0%	4%	8%	42%	46%	4,30	1	Agree

	motivate students who lack confidence.								
<b>Item 4</b>	Participating in public speaking activities more will help you perform better in presentations.	2%	4%	12%	43%	39%	4,13	<b>4</b>	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Item 5</b>	Your confidence in public speaking can be improved by using some strategies and seeking some more tutorials.	3%	10%	10%	45%	32%	3,93	<b>5</b>	<b>Agree</b>

**Table 2: The curriculum factors contributing the level of confidence**

In a more detailed description of the data, as shown in Table 2, 48% of students strongly agree that they spend time practicing their public speaking outside the classroom, and 37% agree about it. This can be implied that the level of confidence can be developed through extra-curricular activities or the more off-class practice the student experience, the higher level of confidence the students can gain. In addition, when the students were asked about requiring more guided practice with their public speaking, 47% of students strongly agree, and 38% of students agree with this. Also, most of the students (46% with “strongly agree” responses and 42% with “agree” response) believe that teachers have an important role to find effective strategies to motivate students who lack confidence. This implies that the level of confidence remarkably increases in line with the support from the teachers. Moreover, the majority of the students agree that their confidence in public speaking can be improved by using some strategies and seeking some more tutorials. Thus, providing a good curriculum means a good motivation for enhancing confidence in public speaking for the target students.

In order to build up students’ confidence in public speaking, the writers attempted to focus on two categories of strategies such as preparation strategies and delivery strategies. Firstly, the results showed that the number of students who carefully consider the language feature in the speech and systematically organize the speech outline appropriately occupy the highest percentage (equally 88%, mean = 4.33 and 4.34 respectively). In addition, most of the surveyed students considered selecting favourite topics (mean = 4.32) and getting to know their audiences (mean = 4.22) also the main preparation before giving a speech. Secondly, with regard to delivery strategies, 89% of the surveyed students admitted that they motivated themselves by expecting positive reaction while giving a speech, which ranked the first as one delivery strategy, followed by using humour as needed to deliver public speech and managing time effectively, which ranked the second and third respectively.

This study concerns with Vietnamese EFL sophomores’ perception of their level of confidence in public speaking. The factors contributing to the level of confidence in public speaking included psychological factors such as getting tense when being asked to present in front of a group or crowd about a particular topic. However, students could deal with feeling anxious in moderate level. In addition, the physiological factors were that they feel uncomfortable before giving the speech. They, however, could manage their physiological issues in an appropriate level. For strategies, the preparation strategies in public speaking among English-majored students at TNUS were selecting the topic from their interests and carefully considering the language features such as grammar, vocabulary and language expressions. At the same time, the delivering strategies in giving a public speech were mentioned as speaking confidently, clearly and fluently with positive reaction and a sense of humor.

## V. Conclusions And Recommendations

The majority of the English-majored sophomores at the University of Sciences, Thai Nguyen University admitted they encountered confidence-related problems with their public speaking skill. They usually felt tense while dealing with public speaking tasks.

The main psychological factors contributing to the level of confidence in public speaking are considered while the students need to deliver a public speech. The current study determined that the problem about confusion and loss of attention was one of the factors that reduce the level of confidence. The physiological factors contributing to confidence in public speaking were considered as discomforts when they need to present the speech in public. Some of students agreed that they have problems such as hands tremble, fast heartbeats or perspire before doing public speaking.

Overall, the preparation strategies in public speaking for enhancing the confidence level in public speaking outstandingly mentioned selecting the interested topics and appropriate language features before giving a speech. This was a very important issue to consider it effectively delivered in public speech. The delivering strategies in public speaking to enhance the level of confidence concluded that the students need to convey the speeches appropriately. It is necessary that they could adapt their speeches with a variety of humors, conveying appropriate speeches in particular context.

The research proves that being confident in public speaking is a learned skill and can be improved by preparing, practicing and rehearsing before presentations or speeches and people who experience the lack of

confidence in public speaking can perform as well as those who have a good command over public speaking. Here are some techniques which can help students enhance their confidence in public speaking. Firstly, the teacher needs to support the students who are not confident with personalized tutorials and extra practice, particularly small group practice in order to improve the confidence of the students. Secondly, better preparation and understanding of the topic eliminates the chance of making a mistake or getting off track during a public speaking activity. The speakers should also anticipate audience responses and queries that may be generated during practice so that they could have confident answers. Lastly, Joining an active public speaking forum would also benefit the students. Once they get into the habit of considering themselves comfortable in an unknown environment while speaking in public, the level of confidence would automatically increase and make the speakers feel at ease.

In this study, main psychological factors, physiological factors and curriculum factors contributing to the confidence in public speaking are various. The study should be conducted with other samples and a large number of subjects, especially in an international program of English language teaching or people who are currently working in international organizations.

Additionally, other research instruments should be used for data collection in a qualitative approach. For instances, semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, case study and a longitudinal study should be used for further studies. These kinds of methodologies should be applied to provide more comprehensible understanding and detailed descriptions of the subjects in further investigating or ongoing research.

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