

# The Influence of Beliefs & Expectations on Public Speaking Anxiety

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## ABSTRACT

In higher institutions, public speaking is almost a compulsory component for many end-of-semester assessments. While many students managed the presentations, many are reported to have anxiety when it comes to public speaking. Some fear public speaking because of the pressure to do well. Some have public anxiety because they lacked confidence. What cause public speaking anxiety? This quantitative pilot study is done to explore fear of public speaking factors among undergraduates. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey. With reference to table 1 above, scale 1 refers to never and scale 2 refers to rarely. Meanwhile, scale 3 refers to sometimes, scale 4 is sometimes while scale 5 refers to always. The instrument is anchored from the classic processes in self-fulfilling prophecy by Merton (1948) with the items replicated from Bartholomay & Houlihan (2016) on public speaking anxiety. Findings revealed interesting sources of public speaking anxiety as well as relationship among the affected variables. The highest mean is the speakers' beliefs & expectations. These results of this study revealed relationships between beliefs & expectations and behaviour. There is also an association between behaviour and results; as well as association between beliefs & expectations and results. The findings of this study bear interesting implications towards sources of public speaking. The findings also added to a body of literature regarding public speaking anxiety among undergraduates.

**Keywords:** public speaking, anxiety, beliefs, expectation, behaviour, results

## INTRODUCTION

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For students entering higher institutions of learning and are already afraid (anxious) of public speaking, they can be surprised to know that almost all courses end-of-semester assessments involve some form of oral presentations. Oral presentations are formal, usually structured form of communication between the speaker and the audience. Why is there emphasis on oral presentations in higher institutions? This is done to prepare graduands for their working life later. For many, work life requires a person to have public speaking skills. Public speaking is important for personal and especially professional growth. Good public speakers are able to connect with their audience. They share their ideas and with good rapport while speaking, they build good relationships with their audience when they speak.

Nevertheless, many are still anxious when it comes public speaking. Some may fear public speaking because they want to do well. Some may fear public speaking because they are not confident using the language for an audience. Ibrahim, et.al. (2021) found that public speaking fear is caused by internal and external factors. He suggested that future research need to look into public speaking fear. This study is done to explore reasons behind why students are anxious of public speaking. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

1. How do learners' beliefs & expectations influence their public speaking fear?
2. How do learners' behaviour influence their public speaking fear?
3. How do learners' results influence their public speaking fear?
4. How do the means differ for all processes in self-fulfilling prophecy?

5. Is there a relationship between beliefs & expectations with all processes in self-fulfilling prophecy?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Framework of the Study

#### Theory of Speaking

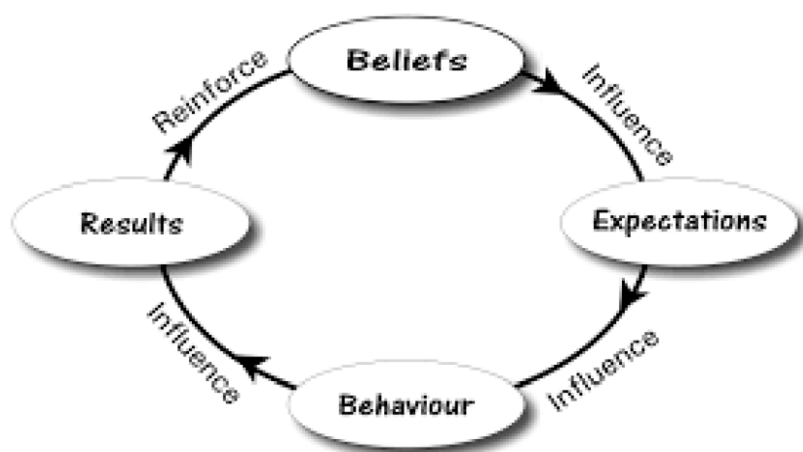
Speaking is defined by different experts based on its functions. Speaking is the ability of a person to express verbally and the message is delivered to the listener. According to Harmer (2007), speaking requires the speaker to use language features as well as process language and information.

Next, Richards (2009) states that there are three types of talk. The first type is talk as interaction. This is the kind of talk for social purposes. This type of talk is used to develop rapport among people. The second type of talk is talk as transaction. This type of talk is focused on task and it is used to convey information such as asking for directions or making a purchase. The last type of talk is talk as performance. This type of talk includes public speaking and is done to deliver information to the audience. The skills involved in using talk of performance includes using an assigned format and following a sequence. This type of talk requires the speaker to use correct pronunciation and grammar. The speaker needs to use appropriate vocabulary. There is usually audience engagement during talk as performance. However, the presence of audience for public speaking can put pressure on the speaker. This pressure can cause speakers to have public speaking anxiety. Nevertheless, although public speaking anxiety is real, but the causes of the anxiety can begin with the speaker's thoughts and these thoughts can affect the speakers' performance in the talk.

#### Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1948) is a situation where a person's belief or expectations can influence his/her behaviour. With reference to figure 1 below, the prophecy explains a situation where a person's initial expectations (be it positive or negative) ends up coming true. For example, a person may begin with a negative expectation of learning a course. This negative expectation influences the way he/she deals with the aspects of learning the course. The negative expectation gives the learner a negative attitude towards the course. Learning is affected by the negative attitude and the learner ends up not doing well in the course.

Figure 1- Self-Fulfilling Prophecy (source: Merton, 1946)



There are some key aspects of this prophecy. Firstly, false beliefs or expectation may not be accurate. This inaccurate belief molds the person's behaviour to act according to the initial expectations. The resulting behaviour of that expectation will reinforce the initial expectations.

#### Past Studies

Firstly, the study by Mokhtar (2025) was done to look into students' perception on their public speaking anxiety

(PSA) for both virtual and physical presentations. The students were from a Malaysian public university. Data was collected from semi-structured interviews. Analysis was done using NVivo. Findings showed that students often experience significant emotional responses such as nervousness and fear. They also reported they had physical symptoms such as shaking hands and rapid heartbeat.

Tarbani,et.al. (2024) investigated the factors that caused public speaking anxiety for students. The study also looked into the strategies used to overcome public speaking anxiety used by second grade students in a senior high school in an Islamic boarding school in Indonesia. Data was collected from observation and interview. Findings indicated student's occurrence of public speaking anxiety. Students also reported they lacked confidence, language proficiency and vocabulary skills. Findings also revealed students were anxious with the presence of audience for their public speaking.

Another study on public speaking was carried out by Ye,et.al (2024). This mixed mode study explored 297 students' perceptions on virtual public speaking. Specifically, this study looked at how students feel about presenting virtual public speaking across different audience size, engagement levels as well as room spatial dimension. Analysis of public speaking anxiety (PSA) was done using principal axis factoring with multiple regression identifying three factors. The factors are F1 (Engagement in a Large Audience), F2 (Confinement or Evaluation Anxiety), and F3 (Audience Disengagement). Findings showed that public speaking anxiety is influence by audience size, room dimensions and audience engagement.

The study by Lintner & Belovecova (2023) explored demographic predictors of public speaking anxiety. This quantitative study used the Personal Report of Confidence as the instrument to assess public speaking anxiety levels. 1745 students participated in this study. Findings revealed that gender, type of high school and study level show significant influence on public speaking anxiety. The study also discovered that women, non-binary individuals, graduates of academic high schools and also students studying at the bachelor level are more susceptible to public speaking anxiety.

Fauzi, et.al.(2023) carried out a quantitative research to investigate factors for public speaking anxiety and the measures used to reduce. The study was done in Sri Aman, Sarawak, Malaysia. The 35 respondents were business owners who attended in a community training program. Findings revealed that the participants reported audience judgement, lack of presentation skills as their public speaking anxiety cause. They also reported their lack of language proficiency as a factor towards the anxiety too. In addition to that, participants reported needing professional help to improve their public speaking skills.

A study by Pariadaluddin, et.al. (2023) investigated the causes of public speaking anxiety (PSA) among international and Malaysian post graduate students. The instrument for this qualitative study is a Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) and Foreign Language Communication Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Three postgraduate students were interviewed in this study. Findings revealed that the fear of public speaking stems from fear of negative evaluation and fear of making errors. It was also reported that the participants feared the audience especially their peers.

Next, Azhar,et.al. (2022) conducted a study to explore students' perceptions on end-of-semester oral presentation. The study looked at how students felt about communication apprehension, and negative evaluation during their speech. 63 students participated in this quantitative study. The instrument used was a survey to measure fear of oral presentation. Findings showed that students were anxious with the presence of the audience from the industry as well as their peers.

The study by Grieve, et.al. (2021) was done with two aims. Firstly, this qualitative study explored the causes of fear of public speaking and the strategies students use to overcome the fear. The second aim was to investigate if this fear has effects of their higher education experience. Data was collected from four open-ended questions. 46 students participated in this study. Data was analysed using thematic analysis and the themes identified were fear of being evaluated, lack of practice and preparation, and more practical support needed.

A quantitative study was done by Ibrahim, etl.al. (2021) to investigate the causes of public speaking anxiety among university students. 171 students participated in this study. The findings revealed that public speaking

anxiety is caused by internal and external factors. The students were influence by cognitive and behavioural factors.

To summarize, public speaking anxiety is caused by internal and external factors. Internal factors include the students not having confidence, or being afraid oof what audience think. The students could lack presentation skills and this inadequacy further add anxiety. External factors include factors like the physical feature of the room. To some, a large room allows more audience and vice versa. This fear of the physical feature can escalate to the existing fear of presentation. Next, the presence of audience can be an added anxiety to speakers. The fear can be increased when the presentation is being assessed by the audience.

### Conceptual Framework

This study (figure 2) is anchored by Merton's (1948) self-fulfilling prophecy. Metron (1948) states that fear is a cyclical process. In the context of public speaking, the speaker begins with beliefs about his/her speaking performance. The beliefs can be a speaker worry about his/her preparations for the speech- a worry that he/she may not do well in the speech. The beliefs can also be the speakers' worrying about the audience expectations.

This belief and expectations shape the person's behaviour towards the speech performance. The end result of the worry may be negative if the expectations were negative and vice versa.

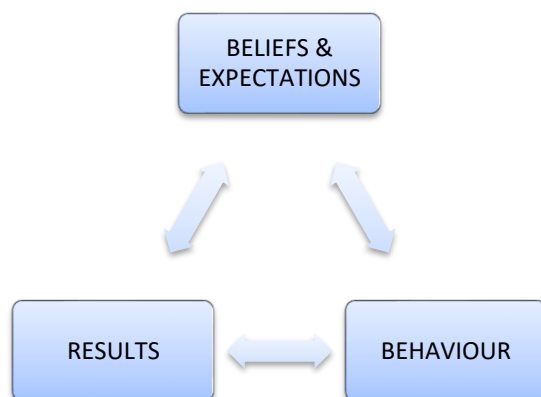


Figure 2-Conceptual Framework of the Study

The Influence of Beliefs & Expectations on Public Speech Anxiety

### METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study is done to explore fear of public speaking factors among undergraduates. This pilot study is done with 38 participants. They responded to the survey. They comprise of students who attended an English proficiency class focusing on oral presentation skills.

Table 1- LIKERT SCALE

1	Never
2	Rarely
3	Sometimes
4	Very Often
5	Always

The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey. With reference to table 1 above, scale 1 refers to never and scale 2 refers to rarely. Meanwhile, scale 3 refers to sometimes, scale 4 is sometimes while scale 5 refers to always. The instrument is anchored from the classic processes in self-fulfilling prophecy by Merton (1948) with the items

replicated from Bartholomay & Houlihan (2016) on public speaking anxiety. With reference to table 2 below, the survey has 4 sections. Section A has items on demographic profile. Section B has 8 items on beliefs & expectation. Section C has 4 items on behaviour. Section D has 5 items on results.

Table 2- Distribution of Items in the Survey

No	Category In Self Fulfilling Prophecy	Sub-Category	Cronbach Alpha
B	Beliefs & Expectations	8	.953
C	Behaviour	4	.848
D	Results	5	.884
	Total Items	17	.968

Table 2 also shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .953 for Beliefs & expectations, .848 for behaviour and .884 for results. The overall Cronbach alpha for all 17 items is .968, thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

## FINDINGS

### Findings for Demographic Profile

Table 3- Percentage for Demographic Profile

Question	Demographic Profile	Categories	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	32%
		Female	68%
2	Self-Rating English Proficiency	Can communicate in English	92%
		Cannot communicate in English	8%

Table 3 above presents the percentage for demographic profile. 32% of the respondents were male while 68% were female students. In addition to that, 92% of the students reported they could communicate in English while only 8% reported they could not communicate in English.

### Findings for Beliefs & Expectations

The findings for research question 1 is presented below;

How do learners' beliefs & expectations influence their public speaking fear? In the context of this study, eight items were used to measure learners' beliefs & expectation.

Table 4- Mean for Beliefs & Expectations (8 items)

STATEMENT/ QUESTION	Mean	SD
BCQ1 Giving a speech is terrifying	3.7	.84714
BCQ2I am afraid that I will be at a loss for words while speaking	3.9	.72743
BCQ3I am nervous that I will embarrass to the audience	3.8	.78933
BCQ4I f I make a mistake in my speech; I am unable to re-focus	3.6	.85174
BCQ5I am worried that my audience will think I am a bad speaker	3.8	.71411
BCQ6I cannot focused on what I am saying during my speech	3.5	.89132
BCQ7I am not confident when I give a speech	3.6	.78978
BCQ8I do not feel satisfied after giving a speech	3.5	.82975



With reference to table 4 above, the highest mean (3.9) is reported for item 2 where respondents said that they were afraid they would be at a loss for word while speaking. This is followed by two items having the same mean of 3.8 and they items reported on students saying they were nervous that they would embarrass themselves in front of the audience and also, they were worried that their audience would think they were bad speakers. The lowest mean is 3.5 where students reported they did not feel satisfied after giving speech.

## Findings for Behaviour

The findings for research question 2 is presented below;

How do learners' behaviour influence their public speaking fear? In the context of this study, four items were used to measure learners' behaviour.

Table 5- Mean for Behaviour (4 items)

STATEMENT/ QUESTION	Mean	SD
CBQ1 My hands shake when I give a speech	3.6	1.00355
CBQ 2I fidget before speaking	3.8	.80052
CBQ 3 My voice trembles when I give a speech	3.5	.79293
CBQ 4 I find it difficult to make eye contact with my audience	3.5	.82846

Table 5 above shows the mean for behaviour of students during public speaking. The highest mean is 3.8 for the second item. This item reported that students perceived themselves as fidgeting before they spoke. Next, the students also reported (mean=3.6) that their hands shook when they gave a speech. Two items shared the same mean of 3.5. The items reported that students agreed that their voice trembled when they gave a speech and that they found it difficult to make eye contact with their audience.

## Findings for Results

The findings for research question 3 is presented below;

How do learners' results influence their public speaking fear? In the context of this study, five items were identified to measure learners' results.

Table 6- Mean for Results (5 items)

STATEMENT/ QUESTION	Mean	SD
DPQ 1 I feel sick before speaking in front of a group	3.4	.91921
DPQ 2 I feel tense before giving a speech	3.5	.79517
DPQ 3 My heart pounds when I give a speech	3.8	.81983
DPQ4I sweat during my speech	3.4	.94214
DPQ5I do not feel relaxed while giving a speech	3.6	.76042

Table 6 presents the mean for results. The highest mean is 3.8 for the item on "my hear pounds when I give a speech". Next, students reported that that they did not feel relaxed while giving a speech (mean=3.6). Two items shared the same lowest mean of 3.4. The items reported that the participants felt sick before they spoke and they felt that they sweat during their speech.

## Findings for Total Mean

The findings for research question 4 is presented below;

How do the means differ for all processes in self-fulfilling prophecy? In order to answer this question, the total

mean of all three processes were calculated using SPSS. The results were presented in table 7 below.

Table 7- Total Mean for all Processes

CATEGORY IN SELF FULFILING PROPHECY	SUB-CATEGORY	TOT MEAN	SD
Beliefs & Expectations	8	3.7	.70095
<u>Behaviour</u>	4	3.6	.71362
Results	5	3.5	.70255

With reference to table 7 above, “beliefs & expectations” had the. Highest mean of 3.7. This is followed by behaviour (3.6). The lowest total mean is for results (3.5). In the context of this study, students perceived their beliefs & expectations as most important. Their public speaking fear is rooted from what they believe and expected from themselves and also from the audience.

Findings for Relationship beliefs & expectations with all processes in self-fulfilling prophecy

The findings for research question 5 is presented below;

Is there a relationship between beliefs & expectations with all processes in self-fulfilling prophecy?

To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between beliefs & expectations with all processes in self-fulfilling prophecy, data is analyzed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in table 8, 9 and 10 below.

Table 8- Correlation between Beliefs & Expectations and Behaviour

		BELIEFS & EXPECTATIONS	BEHAVIOUR
BELIEFS & EXPECTATIONS	Pearson (Correlation	1	.881**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	38	38
BEHAVIOUR	Pearson (Correlation	.864**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	80	80

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 8 shows there is an association between beliefs & expectations and behaviour. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between beliefs & expectations and behaviour ( $r=.881^{**}$ ) and ( $p=.000$ ). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between beliefs & expectations and behaviour.

Table 9- Correlation between Behaviour and Results

		BEHAVIOUR	RESULTS
BEHAVIOUR	Pearson (Correlation	1	.921**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	38	38
RESULTS	Pearson (Correlation	.921**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	80	80

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 9 shows there is an association between behaviour and results. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between behaviour and results ( $r=.921^{**}$ ) and ( $p=.000$ ). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between behaviour and results.

Table 10- Correlation between Beliefs & Expectations and Results

		BELIEFS & EXPECTATIONS	RESULTS
BELIEFS & EXPECTATIONS	Pearson (Correlation)	1	.850**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	38	38
RESULTS	Pearson (Correlation)	.850**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	80	80

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 10 shows there is an association between beliefs & expectations and results. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between beliefs & expectations and results ( $r=.850^{**}$ ) and ( $p=.000$ ). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between beliefs & expectations and results.

## CONCLUSION

### Summary of Findings and Discussions

#### Beliefs & Expectation

This study has revealed interesting findings about students' beliefs and expectations. The participants have indeed shown that what they believed is translated into their expectations. Participants reported the highest mean for worrying about lost for words and not having confidence in their ability. Participants also reported that they were anxious about the presence of audience. Similar findings were also reported by Azhar, et.al. (2022) and Tarbani, et.al. (2024) who found that speakers beliefs about what to expect from the audience reduced their confidence to present. Behaviour.

Participants in the study reported that they displayed physical symptoms such as fidgeting, or shaking nervously when they presented. The further reported that this fear would hinder them from making eye-contact with the audience. Similar findings were also reported by Mokhtar (2025) who agreed that emotional response can escalate to reveal itself in the form of behaviour by the speakers during the speech.

## RESULTS

In terms of public speaking, fear begins from a belief that they (the speakers) are not confident. This lack of confidence can escalate into behavioural symptoms that may or may not affect the presentation of the speech. Participants in this study reported that they were not relaxed when they gave the speech. This uneasy then influences the result of the speech. They (the speakers) may display the anxiety to the audience. This is also supported by Ibrahim, et.al (2021) and Lintner & Belovecova (2023) who agreed that what the speaker's belief leads to their behaviour during the speech and this behaviour will lead to the outcome (results) of the speech.

### Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The highest mean is the speakers' beliefs & expectations. This is followed by the lowest mean for results. This



result helped to confirm the initial construction of the conceptual framework that public speaking anxiety is cyclical. It begins with a heavy emphasis on beliefs & expectation. These beliefs and expectation influence the speaker's behaviour through physical symptoms. As a result, the speech may not turn out well because of the speakers' initial belief & expectations. This cyclic relationship is further supported by the results of correlations between the variables. These results of this study revealed relationships between beliefs & expectations and behaviour. There is also an association between behaviour and results; as well as association between beliefs & expectations and results.

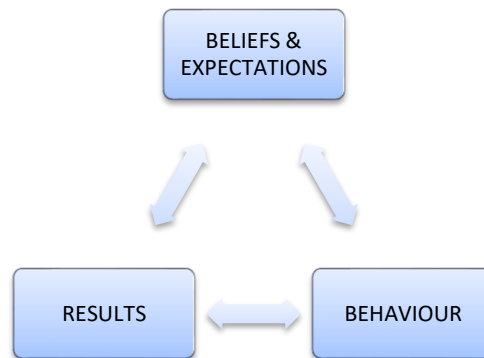


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study the Influence of Beliefs & Expectations on Public Speech Anxiety  
The results of this study can be related to the classic theory of the law of effect by Thorndike (1927). The law states that actions that are followed by positive results are more likely repeated. In the context of this study, the opposite is also true. A negative result for public speech can begin by what the speaker believes about himself/herself. The belief leads to the speaker having expectations of the outcome of the speech. If that expectation is negative, it will be translated into the speaker's behaviour during the speech; which eventually affects the end result of the speech.

Future research could look deeper into more variety of causes of public speaking anxiety. It would be interesting to research into good speaker in terms of what positive beliefs and expectations were stored in their mind to have had a positive outcome (result) of the speech. Future research could expand on demographic findings such as examining gender differences or language proficiency effects on anxiety levels. Future research could also focus on incorporating data (eg, open-ended responses or interviews) that could enrich the findings and provide deeper insight into students subjective experience.

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