

## Public Speaking in Academic Context: A Study of Student Communication Obstacles and Strategies

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### Abstract

*Public speaking is one of the most important skills for students. Public communication skills not only play a role in supporting academic success, but also provide great benefits in professional and social life. In fact, it turns out that many students still experience obstacles when they have to speak in front of many people, including in academic presentations. Based on these facts, this study attempts to classify the obstacles to public communication of students so that recommendations can be provided to overcome these obstacles to public communication in the campus environment. Data were collected using observation and interview methods. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using the content analysis method and presented informally. The findings of this study are several obstacles to public communication, namely linguistic, psychological, technical, environmental, body movement, mastery of material, and visual aids. From these findings, it is concluded that the obstacles to public communication in students' academic presentations mostly come from internal factors (linguistic, psychological, body movement, and mastery of material) and external factors (technical, visual aids, and environmental). Students who are less accustomed to public speaking tend to have difficulty organizing material and delivering it well. In addition, the lack of training in the use of presentation aids worsens the situation.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Public communication is a form of communication that occurs between a person and the general public (Dyatmika, 2021). This form of communication is one of the most important skills for most people, including students. Public communication skills not only play a role in supporting academic success, but also provide great benefits in professional and social life.

In various situations, such as class presentations, group discussions, to leading an event, public speaking skills train students to appear confident and able to convey their ideas clearly and convincingly. The confidence built through this skill can also help them in establishing effective communication in everyday life.

Public speaking has three main purposes: to inform, to influence the audience, and to entertain. In an academic context, students often act as speakers who are tasked with delivering material or research results in the form of presentations. Therefore, mastery of public communication techniques is key so that they are able to convey messages in an interesting and easy-to-understand

way. In addition, this skill also reflects their readiness to face the professional world, where communication skills are often one of the main factors in career success.

However, in fact, not all students feel comfortable or confident when speaking in public. Various obstacles often prevent them from performing optimally (Rengganawati, 2024). In the communication process, the element of disturbance is considered as a dysfunctional element. This means that the element provides consequences that are not relevant to the entire elements in a communication act system. So when communication is seen as a system, its elements are a unity that provides relevant consequences in achieving communication goals (Mucharam, 2022).

These obstacles can be grouped into internal and external factors. Internal factors include excessive anxiety, lack of mastery of the material, limited language skills, and low self-confidence (Hasanah et al., nd). Meanwhile, external factors can be lack of environmental support, minimal experience, or a less conducive audience atmosphere.

Research on communication barriers in college students has become a relevant topic, especially in the academic context. Previous studies have highlighted communication anxiety, such as "public speaking anxiety" which is often experienced by students when making academic presentations. This includes internal factors, such as lack of self-confidence, and external factors, such as a less supportive environment or audience (Suryani, 2020).

In the digital era, the use of technology in public communication has become more dominant. Previous research has shown that digital platforms, such as video-based presentations or virtual meetings, can provide convenience, but also present new challenges, such as technical barriers and decreased non-verbal interaction (Rahman, 2021).

Students' communication competencies are often influenced by their ability to prepare materials, use digital media, and ability to adapt to the audience (Pratama, 2017). However, this research generally focuses on general communication skills without detailing the obstacles faced in the context of the digital era.

Furthermore, this study offers novelty through its specific focus and approach. This study examines communication barriers in college students in the context of the digital era, involving the use of technologies such as virtual presentations and other digital tools, and how these technologies affect their public communication skills.

Unlike previous studies that tend to generalize students' communication competencies, this study specifically analyzes communication barriers in academic presentations, both directly (face-to-face) and through digital media. This study also combines analysis of psychological (e.g. anxiety or lack of confidence) and technological (e.g. technical glitches, limited digital features, or media skills) communication barriers. This approach provides a more comprehensive picture of the barriers faced by students in the digital era.

Ultimately, public speaking skills are not just about being able to deliver a message, but also about building self-confidence, thinking critically, and communicating effectively with an audience. Therefore, students should see these skills as an important investment in supporting their success in various aspects of life.

Based on the conditions that have been explained above, this study aims to analyze the types of obstacles to public communication of students, determine the impact of these obstacles, and provide recommendations to overcome obstacles to public communication in the campus environment. However, the object of the study is focused on the obstacles to public communication experienced by 7th semester students of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program. This is because graduates of this study program are expected to have good language skills and can use them as a profession related to communication, such as event presenters, journalists, resource persons, motivators, and so on. In addition, this study also refers to language skills in accordance with Indonesian language rules. This is because the object of the study will be focused on students of the Indonesian Language and Literature study program (Wahyuni et al., 2024).

## 2. METHOD

Data collection methods used in this study were observation and interview methods. Observation and interview methods are data collection techniques commonly used in qualitative research. Observation is the process of directly observing certain behaviors, interactions, or phenomena in the natural environment without researcher intervention. In this study, observation was conducted by observing academic presentations conducted by four classes of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education study program, FKIP, Mataram University in the Public Communication course and recording communication obstacles on the assessment instrument that had been prepared. As additional information, the researcher also acts as a lecturer for the course.

Furthermore, interviews are a data collection technique by communicating directly with respondents to obtain in-depth information. Interviews can be conducted in a structured manner with standard questions, semi-structured with flexibility in developing questions, or unstructured which is more free and explorative. The combination of these two methods allows researchers to obtain richer and deeper data, because observation helps understand the social context, while interviews explore the perspectives and direct experiences of participants. The informants in this study were several students who experienced communication problems to obtain more valid data.

Next, data analysis is carried out using the content analysis method with the stages of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion and verification. In qualitative analysis, the integration between the data provision and data analysis stages is seen as something that is circular and inseparable (Mahsun, 2019).

Finally, the method for presenting the results of data analysis uses informal methods. The informal method is a method of presenting the results of data analysis using words as usual.

## 3. DISCUSSION

From the results of the research that has been conducted through the stages of data collection and analysis on student performance when conducting academic presentations, several major obstacles were found in public communication. These obstacles can be classified into 7 categories, namely linguistic, psychological, technical, environmental, body movement, mastery of material, and visual aids. It should be noted that observations were conducted on 4 classes, each of which consisted of 30 people, so that the total number of students assessed was 120 people with the possibility of experiencing more than one obstacle. The table below is the result of filling in the assessment instrument when students were presenting.

Table 1. Public Communication Constraints

No.	Obstacle Categories	Amount	Percentage
1	Linguistics	106	22.65%
2	Psychological	97	20.73%
3	Technical	15	3,21%
4	Environment	10	2.14%
5	<i>Body Movement</i>	110	23.50%
6	Mastery of Material	70	14.96%
7	Visual Aids	60	12.82%

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that the most dominant or most frequent obstacles experienced by students are body movement (23.50%) and linguistic or language (22.65%). Psychological obstacles such as nervousness and lack of self-confidence are also quite significant (20.73%). Meanwhile, mastery of materials, techniques, environment, and visual aids also need to be

considered to support public communication skills optimally. Furthermore, the discussion of each category of obstacles will be explained below.

### **Types of Public Communication Obstacles in Student Presentations**

#### **1) Language/Linguistic Barriers**

Linguistic barriers are obstacles experienced by students related to good and correct language mastery. This needs to be considered considering that the students who are the objects of research are students of the Indonesian Language and Literature study program who are certainly expected to have good language skills. Good language mastery will show a systematic and structured way of thinking. In fact, there are still many students who have difficulty in conveying material in terms of language aspects. Some of the obstacles found are as follows.

First, the use of less formal and academic language, such as "So I will explain." Second, difficulty in choosing the right diction to convey ideas. Third, unnecessary repetition of words, such as "so, so...", and fourth, students too often use filler words such as "emm", "anu" or "so" which reduces the effectiveness of communication.

#### **2) Body Movement Constraints**

Body Movement or body language is a very important aspect in public communication. Body language is included in the category of nonverbal communication. Researchers have concluded that more than half of the communication process is a nonverbal process. Albert Mehrabian also stated that the audience's perception of a speaker is formed in three ways, namely visual - appearance by 55%, vocal - sound by 38%, and verbal - message by 7% (Bonar, 2010). Based on the results of the research conducted, it turns out that body movements actually provide the most important contribution, which is 55% of all aspects that we must master in delivering a presentation. Based on this, body movements are one of the skills that need to be mastered well by students. Here are some findings during presentation observations.

First, students tend to be too quiet and stiff during presentations. Second, excessive body movements that disrupt the audience's focus. Third, unfocused gaze or not daring to look at the audience, such as continuously looking in one direction or not making eye contact with the audience. Lastly, minimal use of hand gestures that support the explanation.

#### **3) Psychological Barriers**

Psychological aspects have a significant influence on the quality of students' public communication, especially in the context of academic presentations. Psychological factors such as self-confidence, public speaking anxiety, motivation, and self-perception of communication skills can determine the extent to which a student is able to convey ideas effectively in front of an audience. This aspect is internal and personal, because it is influenced by the experience, personality, and mental condition of each individual. When a student feels anxious or doubtful about his/her abilities, this can interfere with the delivery of the message, reduce the quality of the voice, and inhibit the use of effective body language. In contrast, students who are mentally prepared and confident tend to appear more convincing, structured, and able to establish positive interactions with the audience. The obstacles that are often found are as follows.

First, nervousness and lack of confidence when speaking in public. Second, there is a feeling of fear of negative judgment from lecturers or peers. Third, students do not have experience or are not used to speaking in front of many people.

#### **4) Technical Constraints**

Technical factors are things related to aids during presentations. These technical constraints can also be a factor inhibiting public communication. Some technical constraints that often occur are as follows.

First, there is a disruption in presentation devices such as laptops or projectors. Second, the inability of students to operate presentation software optimally. Finally, the limited ability of students in using visual aids, such as images or graphics, which can support the delivery of material.

#### 5) External Constraints

Environmental factors are external elements that are beyond the direct control of the speaker, but play an important role in determining the success of public communication, including in academic presentations. These factors can come from various sources, such as interference from an uncondusive audience, an uncomfortable room atmosphere (e.g. poor lighting, inappropriate room temperature, or noise), to inadequate supporting facilities such as problematic presentation equipment.(Burhanudin, nd).

In addition, the audience's attitude and attention are also included in environmental factors that affect the smoothness of the delivery of material. If the environment where communication takes place is not supportive, students as speakers can experience decreased concentration, impaired speech rhythm, or even increased anxiety. Therefore, the readiness of a conducive environment is very important to support communication performance and effective message delivery in academic situations. Some of the obstacles found include.

First, noise disturbances from outside the room that reduce the focus of the delivery of the material. Second, the room layout is less supportive, such as dim lighting or lack of supporting facilities. Furthermore, the lack of interaction with the audience due to less than ideal seating arrangements.

#### 6) Constraints in Mastering Material

The material mastery factor also affects the success of the presentation performance. Good material mastery will certainly help smooth public communication. Some findings related to material mastery based on observations and interviews include the following.

First, students read directly from the slides or notes because they do not understand the topic. Second, students are less able to answer questions from the audience well. Lastly, there is a lack of practice and preparation before the presentation.

#### 7) Visual Aids/Assistive Devices Constraints

The last finding related to students' obstacles during public presentations is the mastery of visual aids or assistive devices. Visual aids are also closely related to the mastery of digital tools. Here are some of the obstacles found.

First, the slide designs created by students are too full of unnecessary text or images. Second, the use of colors on the letters on the slides is not contrasting enough so that it is difficult to read. Third, the lack of illustrations on the slides that support audience understanding. Finally, the lack of ability to align oral explanations with visual aids.

### **Strategies for Improving Public Communication Skills in Academic Presentations**

From the findings above, it can be concluded that the obstacles to public communication in students' academic presentations mostly come from internal factors (linguistic, psychological, body language, and mastery of the material) and external factors (technical, visual aids, and environment).

Students who are not used to public speaking tend to have difficulty organizing material and delivering it well. In addition, the lack of training in the use of presentation aids worsens the situation. Based on the findings of the obstacles to public communication that have been explained previously, here are some solutions or strategies that can be done. These strategies include.

- a. Public communication training, where students need to be trained in speaking techniques, academic language mastery, and nervousness management.

- b. Improving technical skills is also necessary, so that students can be more proficient in operating presentation devices and software effectively.
- c. Increasing self-efficacy through various trainings, both independently and in general training. Self-efficacy is a person's belief in their own ability to complete tasks, face challenges, and achieve certain goals (Reza et al., nd)
- d. In addition, the management of the presentation environment must also be considered, for example by improving the presentation room facilities to make them more conducive.
- e. Presentation exercises and simulations in class can also help students build confidence and hone their communication skills.
- f. Effective body movement training to be more convincing and attractive to the audience.
- g. The use of appropriate and interesting visual aids must also be considered so that the material is easier to understand.
- h. Finally, increasing mastery of the material through in-depth practice and research is very important to support the success of academic presentations (Cangara, 2017).

With improvements in these aspects, it is hoped that students will be more confident and effective in delivering their academic material to an audience.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

From the results of observations and data analysis of 4 classes of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education study program, FKIP, Mataram University, who took the Public Communication course, several obstacles were found when conducting academic presentations. These obstacles can be classified into 7 categories, namely linguistic, psychological, technical, environmental, body movement, material mastery, and visual aids. From the findings above, it can be concluded that the obstacles to public communication in students' academic presentations mostly come from internal factors (linguistic, psychological, body movement, and material mastery) and external factors (technical, visual aids, and environmental). Students who are less accustomed to speaking in public tend to have difficulty organizing material and delivering it well. In addition, the lack of training in the use of presentation aids worsens the situation.

#### **5. SUGESSTION**

1. Public Communication Training: Students need to be trained in speaking techniques, mastery of academic language, and managing nervousness to present themselves more confidently during academic presentations.
2. Improving Technical Skills: Technical skills should also be enhanced so that students can operate presentation devices and software more effectively.
3. Enhancing Self-Efficacy: Self-efficacy can be improved through various training sessions, both independently and through general training. Self-efficacy is a person's belief in their ability to complete tasks, face challenges, and achieve certain goals (Reza et al., n.d).
4. Managing the Presentation Environment: Presentation room facilities need to be improved to create a more conducive environment for academic presentations.
5. Presentation Practice and Simulations: Regular practice and presentation simulations in class can help students build confidence and sharpen their communication skills.

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