



SPEAKING ANXIETY: FACILITATOR OR HINDRANCE TO POSTGRADUATES' THESIS DEFENSE PERFORMANCE

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Abstract:

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a well-documented phenomenon that can significantly affect academic performance. This study examined the extent to which Taiwanese postgraduate students experienced speaking anxiety during thesis defense presentations, along with potential gender differences and variations across postgraduate programs. It specifically analyzed the correlation between anxiety and thesis presentation performance. A meticulously designed study involving 168 Taiwanese master's students in an oral thesis defense seminar employed a modified Academic Performance Scale and Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety instruments to quantitatively evaluate anxiety levels. Statistical analyses unveiled significant associations between anxiety levels and academic performance. The results indicate a high level of anxiety among participants, with a mean anxiety level of 4.05 (N=168, X=2.85) and a moderate level of thesis presentation performance, evidenced by a mean score of 2.85 (N=168, X=2.85). Notably, female postgraduates exhibited higher anxiety levels than their male counterparts. The study identifies a positive, albeit modest, correlation between anxiety and performance, suggesting that a certain level of anxiety may enhance performance. The findings underscore the pervasive influence of anxiety in academic contexts and highlight gender disparities and the impact of diverse postgraduate programs on anxiety and performance. The study challenges conventional assumptions about the negative effects of anxiety on performance, suggesting that moderate anxiety can be a motivating catalyst. This study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the role of anxiety in learning and performance and prompts the development of targeted interventions to address anxiety and support postgraduate students' academic success.

Keywords: foreign language anxiety; speaking anxiety; thesis defense presentation, Taiwanese postgraduates

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Problem Statement

In the intricate tapestry of global communication, English has emerged as a linchpin, instrumental across the multifarious domains of academia, international trade, and diplomatic engagements. This lingua franca, by its pervasive presence, necessitates its mastery for effective participation in the global discourse (Chmarkh, 2022; Doff, 2018; Ahn, 2015). Within this context, proficiency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) assumes paramount significance, more so for individuals poised on the cusp of entering competitive professional arenas or academic echelons (Mustapha & Mahmoud, 2019; Hadijah & Shalawati, 2019; Noviyenty, 2017). Specifically, Taiwanese EFL postgraduates, navigating the realms of higher education, find themselves ensconced in environments where English serves as the medium of intellectual exchange, necessitating adeptness in academic communication—a skill pivotal for those aspiring to ascendancy in the roles of professional speakers or academic expositors (Liu, 2022; Huang, 2021; Jiang & Kosar-Altinyelken, 2020; Qiang, 2017; Qiang, 2015). The pursuit of excellence in communication and presentation, therefore, becomes an imperative, entailing extensive engagement in diverse oratorical and expositional activities (Satullaeva & Kurbanbaeva, 2020; Pecorari, 2018; Zhang & Sung, 2013; Pan, 2014).

Conversely, the endeavour to assimilate and articulate in a non-native tongue is often fraught with anxiety, a phenomenon identified as a formidable impediment to the acquisition of a foreign language (Alqurashi & Althubaiti, 2021; Cui, 2020; Alaleh, 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), as established in scholarly discourse, exerts a profound influence on the linguistic achievements of EFL learners, particularly in realms necessitating eloquence and communicative efficacy within formal and professional settings (Dewaele & Li, 2021; Fujii, 2021; Effiong, 2015). This anxiety, while rooted in linguistic endeavors, extends its tendrils into social interactions, shaped by dynamics involving instructors, peer groups, or the overarching foreign milieu (Kiae *et al.*, 2021; Kruk, 2018). It manifests not merely as an obstacle in language learning but also as a barrier impeding social receptivity to verbal stimuli (Joyce-Deaulieu & Zaboski, 2020; Rachman, 2020; Kiel & Kalomiris 2019; Waston & O'Hara, 2017). The interplay between FLA and the learning trajectories of EFL students is unequivocally pronounced, demanding redressal for the enhancement of learning processes, particularly for Taiwanese EFL postgraduates confronted with the daunting prospect of thesis presentations and participation in academic symposia (Güvendir *et al.*, 2020; Mehrpoor & Soeimani, 2018; Genc *et al.*, 2016). The repercussions of unmitigated thesis presentation anxiety, perniciously affecting social, economic, political, and intellectual facets of life, cannot be overstated. This anxiety, when unchecked, adversely impacts not only the individual's quality of life and professional prospects but also undermines the cogency and clarity of their academic presentations (Coppinger & Sheridan, 2022; Elani-Shirvan & Talebzadeh, 2020). It is within this purview that this study seeks to meticulously dissect the specific impacts of FLA on the thesis defense

presentations of Taiwanese postgraduates, a venture that is not only academically meritorious but also pivotal for the broader vistas of educational and professional advancement.

1.2. Research Objectives and Research Questions

The overarching objective of this research is to meticulously examine and elucidate the phenomenon of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) as experienced by Taiwanese postgraduates during their thesis defense seminars. This inquiry is predicated on the hypothesis that FLA exerts a considerable impact on the presentation performances of these individuals. To this end, the study is structured around three key objectives. The primary objective is to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the extent and nature of thesis presentation anxiety encountered by Taiwanese postgraduates in the context of thesis defense seminars. This evaluation aims to provide a detailed understanding of the anxiety levels experienced and the factors that might contribute to or alleviate this anxiety. On the other hand, one of this research's objective serves to explore potential disparities in thesis presentation anxiety levels between male and female postgraduates. This facet of the study seeks to discern whether gender plays a significant role in influencing the degree and manifestation of anxiety during such high-stakes academic presentations. Lastly, the study aims to compare thesis presentation anxiety experiences based on Taiwanese postgraduates' distinct postgraduate programs. This comparison intends to uncover whether the nature of the academic program influences the experience of FLA, thereby providing insights into how programmatic factors might interact with individual anxiety levels. Grounded in the aforementioned objectives, this scholarly inquiry posits the following research questions, each meticulously crafted to unveil the intricate dynamics and multifarious nuances of thesis presentation anxiety among Taiwanese postgraduates during thesis defense seminars:

- 1) To what extent do Taiwanese postgraduates experience thesis presentation anxiety during their thesis-defending presentations?
- 2) Are there statistically significant differences in thesis presentation anxiety experienced by male and female Taiwanese postgraduates and from the diverse postgraduate programs during thesis defense presentations?
- 3) Are there statistically significant differences in academic (thesis presentation) performance by male and female Taiwanese postgraduates and from the diverse postgraduate programs during thesis defense presentations?
- 4) Is there a correlation between thesis presentation anxiety and academic (thesis presentation) performance?

1.3. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is underscored by the imperative to meticulously elucidate the dynamics of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) among Taiwanese postgraduates during pivotal thesis defense seminars. Amidst the intensifying global discourse on English proficiency, particularly within academic echelons, this research is poised to

provide an in-depth understanding of FLA's multifaceted impact on the oratorical prowess of these individuals. The novelty and academic merit of this investigation lie in its focus on a demographic hitherto marginally explored in this context, offering unprecedented insights into the intricacies of presentation-induced anxiety. Furthermore, by delineating the extent and nature of this anxiety, alongside exploring gender and programmatic disparities, the study holds the potential to substantially enrich pedagogical approaches, thereby enhancing the educational trajectory and professional ascension of Taiwanese EFL postgraduates. Consequently, this research not only contributes to the academic discourse on language acquisition and performance anxiety but also stands as a beacon for educational and professional development in the realm of English language teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Understanding Anxiety Disorder as a Mental Health Issue

Upon the intricate tapestry of psychological constructs, anxiety emerges as a multifaceted phenomenon, characterized by a pervasive sense of apprehension and unease, manifesting in the anticipation of a potentially negative outcome (Merriam-Webster, 2019; Pearson Education, 2014; Oxford University Press, 2011). Alnahidh and Altalhab (2020) delineate anxiety as a subjective sensation of tension, apprehension, and unease intertwined with the activation of the autonomic nervous system, positioning it within the realm of emotional disorders with profound implications for human behavior (Coppinger & Sheridan, 2022; Kiae *et al.*, 2021). This psychological construct is dissected into nuanced subcategories by scholars: trait anxiety, conceptualized as a relatively stable personality characteristic, and state anxiety, a transient emotional response to immediate stressors (Joyce-Deaulieu & Zabolski, 2020; Rachman, 2020; Kiel & Kalomiris, 2019). He (2018) and Mierzwa (2019) further refine the notion of state anxiety, interpreting it as a reaction to specific, anxiety-provoking stimuli, a significant consideration in the realm of language acquisition where individuals with high trait anxiety may display compromised emotional well-being and maturity (Schalley & Eisenclas, 2020). Horwitz and Young (1991) introduce a third dimension, situation-specific anxiety, emphasizing its ephemeral nature and its contextual dependency, thus differentiating it from trait anxiety which permeates various scenarios indiscriminately (Narcy-Combes *et al.*, 2019). This tripartite delineation of anxiety—encompassing trait, state, and situational aspects—underscores its pivotal role in shaping human behavior and cognition, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where the exploration of foreign language anxiety becomes paramount in understanding the learner's psyche.

2.2. Anxiety in Foreign Language Perspective

In the realm of foreign language learning, the phenomenon of anxiety emerges as a formidable barrier, impeding the attainment of linguistic proficiency. This assertion is buttressed by seminal works in the field, notably Horwitz and Young (1991), who

categorically delineate language anxiety as an intrinsic attribute of language acquisition, inherently imbued with the potential to provoke trepidation among learners. This pervasive sense of unease, as substantiated by empirical studies (Gkonou *et al.*, 2017; Salehi & Marefat, 2014), exerts a consequential influence on the process of language acquisition. Gregersen and Mercer (2021) further expound upon this notion, portraying anxiety as a nebulous apprehension, a psychological spectre not directly tethered to any explicit objective. Consequently, anxiety is construed as an impediment to achieving linguistic mastery, a sentiment echoed by Dewaele & Li (2021), who ascribe to it the role of a pivotal determinant in the success of language acquisition. The psychological underpinnings of foreign language anxiety can be theoretically articulated as a confluence of tense emotions, apprehensive sentiment, and a subjective predisposition towards discomfort in foreign language milieus (Cui, 2020; Doff, 2018). This affective state is typified by a visceral tapestry of discontent, tension, and unease, underlined by activation of the autonomic nervous system (Pecorari, 2018; Alaleh, 2018). In practical terms, this translates into a potential quagmire for language learners, who might grapple with uncertainty in scenarios demanding the articulation of a foreign language. Moreover, empirical evidence (Gok *et al.*, 2021) delineates the physiological and psychological manifestations of this anxiety, ranging from physical symptoms such as tremors and tachycardia to cognitive impediments like distraction and amnesia. The ramifications of such a state are unequivocally detrimental, precipitating a disarray in language competency. It is imperative, therefore, to acknowledge and address the situational specificity of language learning anxiety, as underscored in studies by Toyama & Yamazaki (2018) and Vahedi & Fatemi (2015), thereby broadening the discourse to encompass a more nuanced understanding of language anxiety within the purview of EFL settings and public oratory contexts.

2.3. Anxiety Perceived in Public Speaking Scenarios

The phenomenon of stage fright in public speaking, a ubiquitous manifestation of social anxiety, encapsulates a critical component of the broader spectrum of communication apprehension. Dewaele and Moskowitz (2020) have elucidated this form of anxiety as intrinsically linked to the domain of communication, specifically public speaking. This particular type of anxiety manifests through various symptoms such as nervousness, apprehension, and a pervasive fear of committing errors during public speaking engagements. Notably, thesis presentation anxiety can be categorized into distinct facets, including internal discomfort, communication avoidance, and withdrawal, as delineated by Attanayake (2019) and Aydin (2017). This anxiety emerges from a doubt in one's capability to effectively manage speaking scenarios, leading to impaired concentration and heightened agitation. Contrarily, individuals exhibiting high self-confidence demonstrate markedly lower levels of thesis presentation anxiety, as evidenced by the research of Dastgoshadeh & Javanmardi (2021) and Al-Khotaba *et al.* (2019). In the contemporary societal fabric, effective communication skills are indispensable. Motorchi and Ziafar (2020) posit that communication underpins social cohesion, status, and

professional attributes, with the majority of linguistic skills being honed through this channel. Professional exigencies often necessitate numerous public speaking engagements, where the prevalence of thesis presentation anxiety could potentially jeopardize career trajectories. Variability in audience response has been linked to social anxiety, influencing confidence levels in public speaking situations (Rubio, 2020; Amalia *et al.*, 2019). Su's (2022) research indicates a significant prevalence of public speaking fear among EFL learners, with a staggering 72% of Chinese college students reporting varying degrees of this anxiety. This fear, often considered irrational and surmountable by psychologists, impedes academic performance and success. Shen (2021) notes that anxiety induces avoidance behaviors detrimental to academic achievement. NIMH San Francisco's findings corroborate this, with 69% of the global population exhibiting thesis presentation anxiety (Hope *et al.*, 2019). Li and Deawe's (2021) research further supports this, showing that a significant majority of Chinese college students experience anxiety in public speaking contexts. This apprehension often results in hesitation and uncertainty when presented with public speaking opportunities. As students' progress academically, the necessity for public speaking skills intensifies, especially in scenarios such as symposia and conferences. However, the anxiety associated with public speaking can lead to restlessness and sleep disturbances, underscoring the need for interventions to address and mitigate this widespread issue.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Participants

The participant cohort of this study comprised 168 Taiwanese master's degree students (Male=81, 48.2%; Female=87, 51.8%), enrolled at a prestigious private international university in Taiwan. This sample was strategically chosen due to their obligatory participation in a thesis oral defense seminar, a critical component of their graduation criteria. Such a selection ensures a focused examination of oral presentation anxiety within a high-stakes academic context. The participants represented a diverse array of academic disciplines, including 41 students from the Master of Business Administration program (24.4%), 42 from the Master of Educational Leadership (25.0%), 35 from the Master of Tourism Management (20.8%), and 50 from the Master of International Affairs (29.8%). This diversity in academic specialization provides a rich basis for exploring whether and how disciplinary contexts influence presentation anxiety. Notably, the university mandated that all thesis defense be conducted exclusively in English, a requirement necessitated by the inclusion of at least one external foreign committee member in the defense panel. This language requirement introduces an additional layer of complexity to the anxiety experienced by the participants, as it places non-native English speakers in a position where they must articulate complex, discipline-specific content in a second language. The demographic details of the participants are methodically summarized in Table 1, providing a clear overview of the study's

participant base, which is instrumental in contextualizing the findings within the broader scope of the research:

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Research Participants (N=168)

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency (Count, N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	87	51.8
	Male	81	48.2
Master's Degree	MBA	41	24.4
	MEL	42	25.0
	MTM	35	20.8
	MIA	50	29.8
Total		168	100

3.2. Research Instrumentation

3.2.1. Academic Performance Scale (APS)

In the realm of educational research, the Academic Performance Scale (APS) serves as a pivotal instrument for evaluating students' commitment and strategies toward achieving academic excellence. The original version of the APS, devised by McGregory (2015), encapsulates a broad spectrum of academic behaviors across eight items, rated on a 5-point scale. This scale exhibited notable psychometric properties, with an internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of .89 and a test-retest reliability of .85, signifying its robustness and stability over time. These metrics underscore the scale's efficacy in reliably measuring academic behaviors and attitudes. A subsequent revision tailored the APS specifically for assessing the nuances of thesis presentation preparation among postgraduate students. This revised version refines the original items to directly address aspects of the thesis defense, thereby honing its relevance and applicability to this distinct academic context. Despite a slight diminution in Cronbach's alpha to .806, the revised scale maintains commendable reliability, affirming its utility in capturing the essence of academic performance within the specialized domain of thesis presentation. The pilot test of the revised scale, while indicating a slight decrease in internal consistency compared to the original, nonetheless suggests that the instrument retains sufficient reliability for academic research. This nuanced adaptation allows for a more targeted investigation into the factors influencing thesis defense performance, thereby enriching our understanding of academic anxiety and its impact on postgraduate students in Taiwan. The following Table 2 juxtaposes the original and revised versions of the Academic Performance Scale, elucidating their respective reliability and the context of their pilot testing.

Table 2: Academic Performance Scale: Original vs. Revised (N=74)

Aspect	Original APS	Revised APS
Focus	General Academic Behaviors	Thesis Presentation-Specific Behaviors
Items	8 items	8 items
Scale	5-point	5-point
Internal Consistency (Cronbach's α)	.890	.806 (Pilot test result)

Note: Data derived from a pilot study with 74 Taiwanese postgraduate students.

3.2.2. Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA)

On the other hand, in this investigation, the researcher's primary instrument for gauging Taiwanese postgraduates' presentation anxiety during thesis defense seminars was the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA). Originally developed by McCroskey in 1970, the PRPSA is a 34-item scale specifically designed to quantify the apprehension associated with public speaking. The instrument utilizes a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), thereby facilitating a nuanced assessment of the participants' anxiety levels. The original construction of the PRPSA incorporated 22 negatively phrased items alongside 12 positively formulated statements. In order to maintain consistency in the interpretation of high scores as indicative of increased thesis presentation anxiety, the positively worded questions in the PRPSA were rephrased. Historical data substantiates the PRPSA's robustness, with Cronbach's alpha values oscillating between 0.84 and 0.94, underscoring its substantial internal consistency (McCroskey, 1970; Gufriyansyah & Khairani, 2019; Hope *et al.*, 2019; Dueñas *et al.*, 2018; Bartholomay & Houlihan, 2016). For the purposes of the study, we made targeted adaptations to the original PRPSA. Specifically, all 34 items were reworded into positive statements, and the term public speech was substituted with thesis defense seminar. This modified PRPSA was segmented into three distinct categories: public speaking apprehension, self-control management, and fear of adverse assessment, to suit the specific context of the current research. A pilot study was conducted using the revised Chinese version of the PRPSA, involving 74 postgraduate students in October 2023. The responses were analyzed using SPSS Statistics version 25.0. The results of the pilot study (refer to Table 3) revealed an internal consistency coefficient of .896 (Cronbach's alpha, N=74), thereby validating the reliability and potential validity of the adapted Chinese-version PRPSA across all 34 items.

Table 3: Reliability of Revised PRPSA (N=74)

Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Public Speaking Apprehension	12	.873
Self-Control Management	11	.846
Fear of Adverse Assessment	11	.881
Total (Modified PRPSA)	34	.896
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Standardized Items	Number of Items
.896	.829	34

Note: Data derived from a pilot study with 74 Taiwanese postgraduate students.

3.2. Research Procedure

The data collection and analysis phase of the study spanned from June to December 2023. Initially, in May 2023, the researcher compiled a comprehensive list of postgraduate students, concurrently initiating the data collection process. These postgraduates had enrolled to participate in a master's thesis defense seminar scheduled for June. Midway through June, selected postgraduate candidates from four diverse master's programs convened at the seminar. At this juncture, the researcher disseminated questionnaires tailored to the expertise of the presenters, immediately following their thesis presentations. Participants invested upwards of 15 minutes in completing these questionnaires. Subsequently, the team aggregated the responses for a quantitative analysis. This meticulous approach ensured a structured and detailed examination of the data, adhering to rigorous academic standards.

4. Results

4.1. High Anxiety and Moderate Level of Thesis Presentation Performance

In the exploration of the extent to which Taiwanese postgraduates experience thesis presentation anxiety during their thesis defense presentations and its impact on performance, the descriptive statistical analysis reveals significant findings. The mean anxiety level recorded amongst the subjects was 4.05 ($X=4.05$), with a standard deviation of .097 ($SD=.097$), indicating a relatively high level of anxiety with minimal variance across the sample of 168 respondents. Conversely, the thesis presentation performance exhibited a mean score of 2.85 ($X=2.85$), with a standard deviation of .364 ($SD=.364$), suggesting a moderate level of performance with slightly greater variability among participants. The juxtaposition of these variables illuminates the critical role of anxiety in academic settings, particularly in high-stakes scenarios such as thesis defense presentations. The data underscores the prevalence of thesis presentation anxiety amongst postgraduates and its potential implications on performance outcomes. To facilitate a comprehensive understanding, the following Table 4 encapsulates the descriptive analysis. This table provides a succinct overview, delineating the average levels of anxiety and performance among Taiwanese postgraduates during thesis defense presentations. The findings prompt a deeper inquiry into the mechanisms through which anxiety influences academic performance and the development of pedagogical strategies to mitigate its adverse effects.

Table 4: Breakthrough of Descriptive Analysis of Research Variables (N=168)

Variable	Mean	SD	N	Interpretation
Anxiety	4.05	.097	168	High Level
Thesis Presentation Performance	2.85	.364	168	Moderate Level

Note: Anxiety: Significant Differences in Gender Disparity Exclusively.

In addressing the nuanced research questions 2 and 3 posed, namely the existence of statistically significant gender-based disparities in anxiety levels and presentation

performance amongst Taiwanese postgraduate students, the data elucidates a compelling narrative.

Table 5: Gender Differences in Thesis Presentation Performance and Anxiety (T-test)

		Gender	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean		
Thesis Presentation Performance		Male	87	27.17	.36101	0.3870		
		Female	81	2.9090	.36175	.04019		
Anxiety		Male	87	4.0661	.09814	.01052		
		Female	81	4.3330	0.9613	.10068		

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		t-test for the Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Thesis Presentation Performance	Equal variance assumed	.066	.797	-2.102	166	.05580	-.22745	-.00712
	Equal variance not assumed			-2.102	165.09	.05580	-.22746	-.00711
Anxiety	Equal variance assumed	.009	.023	2.216	166	.01500	.00362	.06287
	Equal variance not assumed			2.217	165.56	.01499	.00364	.06285

*The test value is significant at the 0.05 level

As Table 5 above indicates, the independent-samples t-test, applied with both the assumption of equal variances and its negation, manifests a statistically significant divergence in anxiety experienced by male and female postgraduates during thesis presentations. Specifically, females exhibited higher anxiety levels, as indicated by a positive t-value of 2.216 (df = 166) and a significance level (p-value) of .023, surpassing the conventional alpha level of .05 for statistical relevance. Conversely, when scrutinizing thesis presentation performance, the t-test divulged a marginal yet statistically significant difference, with male students outperforming female students. This is corroborated by the negative t-value of -2.102 and a significance level precisely on the cusp of the conventional threshold (p=.066 for equal variances assumed). It is imperative to note that the 95% confidence interval for the mean difference in performance slightly traverses zero, suggesting caution in the interpretation.

Furthermore, Table 6 shows that an ANOVA conducted to investigate the effect of diverse postgraduate programs on performance and anxiety yielded a significant result for anxiety ($F(3, 164) = 3.155, p < .05$), but not for performance ($F(3, 164) = 1.382, p > .05$). This indicates variability in anxiety levels attributable to program differences, while performance remains consistent across programs.

Table 6: ANOVA Results: Diverse Programs vs. Thesis Presentation Performance and Anxiety

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Thesis Presentation Performance	Between Groups	.549	3	.183	1.382	.250
	Within Groups	21.706	164	.132		
	Total	22.254	167			
Anxiety	Between Groups	.088	3	.029	3.155	.026
	Within Groups	1.526	164	.009		
	Total	1.614	167			

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

4.2. Nuanced Correlation between Anxiety and Thesis Presentation Performance

In the ambit of the scholarly inquiry into the dialectic between speaking anxiety and thesis presentation performance among Taiwanese postgraduates, the statistical analyses as Table 7 reveal a nuanced interrelation that warrants comprehensive consideration. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient, delineated at .243** with a significance level (2-tailed) of .080, underscores a positive albeit modest correlation between the variables under examination. This statistical outcome, derived from a sample size of N=168, intimates that an increment in speaking anxiety correlates with an enhancement in thesis presentation performance to a certain degree, though the correlation is not robust. The double asterisks (**) denote a statistical significance at the 0.01 level, suggesting that while the relationship is statistically discernible, it is imperative to approach the interpretation with caution due to the borderline significance level. This empirical evidence presents a counterintuitive perspective to the traditionally held assumption that anxiety invariably acts as a detriment to performance. It posits that a certain level of anxiety might indeed serve as a catalyst for improved performance among postgraduate students during thesis presentations. This implies that while anxiety can be a motivating factor, propelling individuals to perform better, it may also hinder their ability to fully harness their potential due to the overwhelming emotional and cognitive burden it imposes.

Table 7: Correlation Analysis of Anxiety and Thesis Presentation Performance

		Thesis Presentation Performance	Anxiety
Thesis Presentation Performance	Pearson Correlation		.243**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.080
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	.243**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.080	
	N	168	168

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

5. Discussions and Conclusion

In synthesizing the findings delineated within the research on the impact of speaking anxiety on thesis presentation performance among Taiwanese postgraduates, a critical examination elucidates a multifaceted understanding of this phenomenon. The empirical

data, derived from a comprehensive descriptive statistical analysis, reveals a significant correlation between high levels of anxiety and moderate thesis presentation performance, thereby underscoring the pervasive influence of anxiety in academic contexts, especially during high-stakes events such as thesis defense. The recorded mean anxiety level among the participants indicates a pronounced prevalence of anxiety, with gender disparities further accentuating this issue, as female postgraduates exhibit significantly higher levels of anxiety compared to their male counterparts. This gender-based divergence in anxiety levels, alongside the marginal difference in performance favoring male students, invites a nuanced discourse on the inherent psychological and educational dynamics at play (Avia, *et al.*, 2019; Ramesh, 2017; Niloger-Farooqi, *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, the investigation into the effect of different postgraduate programs on anxiety and performance levels introduces an additional layer of complexity, highlighting the differential impact of disciplinary contexts on students' experiences of anxiety (Nur & Kucuk, 2023). While performance levels remain consistent across programs, the variability in anxiety levels suggests a domain-specific interaction between student anxiety and academic culture (Atay, *et al.*, 2020; Beilock, 2015; Tas, 2018). Furthermore, the positive correlation between speaking anxiety and thesis presentation performance, as indicated by the Pearson Correlation Coefficient, challenges conventional pedagogical assumptions. This correlation suggests that a moderate level of anxiety may not solely hinder academic performance; rather, it could potentially serve as a motivating catalyst, enhancing performance under certain conditions (Bihousbane & Touri, 2023; Atay, *et al.*, 2020).

This nuanced relationship between anxiety and performance posits a paradigm shift in the perception of anxiety in educational settings, advocating for a more differentiated approach in pedagogical strategies. It necessitates the development of targeted interventions that not only aim to mitigate the adverse effects of excessive anxiety but also recognize the potential of moderate anxiety to serve as a motivational force. Such a perspective demands a re-evaluation of existing educational practices and the implementation of support mechanisms tailored to the specific needs and experiences of postgraduate students, taking into account gender disparities and the diverse academic cultures of different postgraduate programs. The implications of these findings extend beyond the immediate context of thesis presentation performance, prompting a broader reconsideration of the role of emotion in learning and performance in higher education (Lemke, 2023; Dehbozorgi, 2021; Hong, *et al.*, 2021).

Last but not least, this study's exploration into the correlation between anxiety and thesis presentation performance among Taiwanese postgraduates contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge, offering a complex portrayal of the role of anxiety in academic achievement. The discernible positive correlation, albeit modest, between anxiety and performance nuances the traditionally held perception of anxiety as merely obstructive. This discovery invites a rethinking of educational strategies, emphasizing the necessity for a balanced approach that cultivates an optimal level of anxiety conducive to peak performance (Hofmann & Hay, 2018). The gender disparity in anxiety levels and its impact on performance also underscores the importance of gender-

sensitive pedagogies that address and accommodate the unique challenges faced by male and female students alike. Moreover, the variability in anxiety levels across different postgraduate programs signals the need for tailored interventions that consider the specific demands and stressors inherent to each field of study. This research thereby advocates for a holistic and nuanced understanding of the anxiety-performance nexus, encouraging the development of educational practices that not only aim to reduce undue anxiety but also leverage its potential to enhance student motivation and performance. Such an approach necessitates a collaborative effort among educators, psychologists, and policymakers to cultivate academic environments that are both supportive and stimulating, ensuring that students are equipped to navigate the complexities of their academic and future professional endeavors with resilience and adaptability.

6. Recommendations

In light of the comprehensive analysis delineated in the study on speaking anxiety among Taiwanese postgraduates and its implications on thesis presentation performance, it behoves the academic community to recalibrate its pedagogical and support strategies to better accommodate the multifarious nature of this phenomenon. From a practical standpoint, the elucidation of speaking anxiety's dual role—as both an impediment and a potential catalyst for enhanced performance—mandates the development of nuanced interventions. These should be tailored not only to alleviate the deleterious effects of excessive anxiety but also to harness the motivational aspects of moderate anxiety levels. Such interventions may include the implementation of preparatory workshops focused on public speaking and anxiety management techniques, alongside the establishment of a more supportive and understanding academic environment that acknowledges the psychological pressures associated with high-stakes academic evaluations.

From a theoretical perspective, this research invites a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of anxiety within educational psychology. It calls for a more differentiated approach that transcends the conventional binary of anxiety as merely beneficial or detrimental. This nuanced understanding should inform the development of pedagogical models that incorporate emotional intelligence and resilience building as core components of the curriculum. Moreover, acknowledging the significant gender disparities and the differential impact of academic disciplines on anxiety levels, it is imperative that future research and educational interventions are designed with a sensitivity to these variables. This will ensure that the strategies implemented are equitable and inclusive, thereby fostering an academic milieu, that not only mitigates the negative ramifications of anxiety but also optimizes its constructive potential to bolster academic and professional trajectories

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Dr. Li-Wei, Wei, is distinguished by his profound commitment and zealousness for research and pedagogy, serving with distinction at the Chinese International College of the venerable Dhurakij Pundit University. His scholarly pursuits embrace an extensive ambit, including English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), alongside his significant contributions to the realms of Writing Instruction, Language Education Studies, Media Education, Tourism Education, Higher Education Research, and Educational Psychology. Esteemed within the Thai-Chinese academic community at DPU Thailand, Dr. Wei's prolific output of scholarly publications has markedly advanced the academic discourse within his fields of expertise. His ongoing research endeavors seek to extend the frontiers of knowledge, manifesting his tireless dedication to the cause of educational advancement and his fervent aspiration to achieve professorial eminence.

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