Anxiety over Public Speaking: A Generational Perspective

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Introduction

Public speaking anxiety varies significantly depending on factors such as personality, educational background, life experiences, and generational identity. In recent years, however, **technological advancement** has emerged as a key variable shaping how different generations experience, perceive, and cope with this form of anxiety.

Observations from Academic Practice

During a two-week course entitled *"Developing English for Non-Native Speakers"* at Al-Mustaqbal University in **January 2024**, I worked with **24 university staff members** aged between **27 and 35**. Although the course focused primarily on language development, I observed a noticeable level of **public speaking anxiety** among many participants.

Shortly afterward, in **February 2024**, Al-Mustaqbal University hosted an academic conference in which **22 undergraduate students**, aged **18 to 21**, delivered presentations before an audience of nearly **200 attendees**. What was striking was that the majority of these younger participants demonstrated **little to no visible fear of public speaking**.

While my intention was not to draw direct comparisons between the two groups, these contrasting experiences prompted deeper reflection on the **role of technology in shaping confidence and anxiety related to public speaking**.

Technology and Public Speaking Anxiety: Key Factors

Based on these observations, several contributing factors emerged:

1. Technological Exposure during Formative Years

Older participants may have had limited exposure to digital tools, social media, and artificial intelligence during their formative years. As a result, they may have had fewer opportunities to practice public speaking in

virtual or semi-public digital spaces, or to receive structured feedback on their performance.

2. Comfort with Virtual Communication Platforms

Younger generations—particularly those under the age of 22, often

referred to as **Generation Z or Zoomers**—tend to feel more comfortable using platforms such as video conferencing tools, social media, online forums, and AI-assisted applications. Frequent engagement with these platforms allows them to practice self-expression, presentation, and public interaction in low-risk environments, which may translate into increased confidence during live public speaking situations.

3. Reliance on Traditional Communication Modes

Older generations largely relied on traditional forms of communication, including face-to-face meetings, telephone conversations, and written correspondence. While these modes certainly included opportunities for public speaking, they were often less frequent and less varied than the communicative environments available today.

4. Limited Access to Feedback Mechanisms

In earlier educational and professional contexts, feedback on speaking performance was often limited to immediate verbal responses from instructors or audiences. In contrast, younger generations benefit from continuous and multifaceted feedback through recordings, comments, analytics, and AI-generated evaluations, allowing for ongoing self-correction and confidence building.

Discussion

Exposure to technology and virtual communication platforms appears to play a significant role in shaping how individuals experience and manage public speaking anxiety. Generation Z, having grown up in digitally mediated environments, may be more accustomed to visibility, audience interaction, and self-presentation, reducing the psychological pressure traditionally associated with public speaking.

Conclusion

Public speaking anxiety is not solely a matter of personality or linguistic competence; it is increasingly influenced by **technological experience and**

generational context. While older generations may experience higher levels of anxiety due to limited digital exposure during their formative years, younger generations appear better equipped to navigate public speaking situations with confidence.

Understanding these differences is essential for educators and institutions seeking to design effective communication training programs. By acknowledging generational experiences and integrating technology-based practice and feedback, public speaking instruction can become more inclusive, supportive, and effective.