



## QUANTITATIVE METHOD TO EXPLORE THE CRITICAL ISSUES OF SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONGST CHINESE PHD CANDIDATES' DOCTORAL DISSERTATION ORAL DEFENSE

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### Abstract:

Anxiety has a significant effect on oral communication, particularly when it occurs in the form of a public address. The quality of a public academic speaker's oral presentation may highly be determined by a variety of emotive elements. However, this has received much too little attention in the realm of academic dissertation oral defense presentations, despite the fact that this process may be incredibly nerve-wracking for both novice and experienced postgraduates, EFL learners in particular. In the current study, 68 Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates consented to complete a revamped version of the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA). Chinese EFL postgraduates reported an average high level of public speaking anxiety ( $X=4.34$ ) during their doctoral dissertation defense presentations, as measured by three categorical variables: public speaking apprehension ( $X=4.40$ ), self-behavior management ( $X=4.35$ ), and fear of negative evaluation ( $X=4.26$ ). Throughout Ph.D. candidate participants' dissertation defense, fifteen anxiety-related questionnaire items were recognized to be the most anxiety-provoking conditions in terms of public speaking anxiety. In addition, differences in gender and graduate study specialization were not significantly associated with Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates' experiences with public speaking anxiety. Despite the findings, research has revealed that Ph.D. candidates in English as a Foreign Language from China exhibit statistically significant levels of anxiety related to public speaking, and as a result, pedagogical recommendations have been proposed.

**Keywords:** Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates, dissertation defense, foreign language anxiety, public speaking anxiety

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Problem Statement

Indisputably, English becomes manifestly an internationally employed and acknowledged dominant language. We have been witnessing an escalating availability and use of English in our everyday routine contacts. In fact, English remains pertinent for information exchange in so many other areas of life, including academics, market access, governance, and economic history (Chmarkh, 2022; Doff, 2018; Ahn, 2015). Under this circumstance, mastering English as a foreign language (EFL) would seem to be imperative, especially when it pertains to other aspects of our daily lives. Eloquently, the achievement of apposite English competence has been identified as a prerequisite for both student individuals who seek to be aggressively pushed in their employment prospects and those who are most likely to prosper in the educational area (Mustapha & Mahmoud, 2019; Hadijah & Shalawati, 2019; Noviyenty, 2017). Specifically, Chinese EFL abroad postgraduate students excelling academically and internationally utilize English as a medium of professional discourse under higher education contexts (Liu, 2022; Huang, 2021; Jiang & Kosar-Altinyelken, 2020; Qiang, 2017; Qiang, 2015). Learners who strive for employability as highly qualified communicators or presenters for academic matters would be well-advised to allocate a substantial amount of time to hone their public speaking qualities by engaging in a vast array of addressing and delivering opportunities (Satullaeva & Kurbanbaeva, 2020; Pecorari, 2018; Zhang & Sung, 2013; Pan, 2014).

Notwithstanding, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) revealed that building a rapport in the target language has been the most daunting facet of foreign language acquisition. Moreover, in accordance with the findings of a slew of studies, foreign language anxiety is indeed a massive concern and commonly an adverse consequence that may hamper a person's foreign language (FL) acquisition (Alqurashi & Althubaiti, 2021; Cui, 2020; Alaleh, 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is thought to be crucial and compelling in predicting foreign language achievement of EFL learners, principally in speaking skill and communication competence in institutional and highly qualified academic contexts (Dewaele & Li, 2021; Fujii, 2021; Effiong, 2015). By comparison, Kiae et al. (2021) postulated that English-language anxiety corresponds to a form of social anxiety largely dependent on interpersonal interactions. Until then, Kruk (2018) asserted that specific lecturers, cohorts of students, or abroad surroundings are most likely to trigger language anxiety. *Ipsa facto*, language anxiety emanates in addition to language learning but also in social encounters. Similarly, it was theorized and observed that anxiety negatively aligned with a person's emotional filter, attempting to make them less susceptible to language comprehension (Joyce-Deaulieu & Zaboski, 2020; Rachman, 2020; Kiel & Kalomiris, 2019; Waston & O'Hara, 2017). Then that would clearly depict that foreign language anxiety and EFL learners' language performance are positively correlated. FLA is a pervasive problem that requires being solved in order to promote the process of learning in a somewhat more proactive and constructive fashion, explicitly toward academic productions of Chinese EFL Ph.D.

candidates' dissertational oral defense, academic panel discussions, conferences, presentations, etc., demanding interpersonal communication skills. In light of this circumstance, certain individuals who perceive anxiety may be hesitant, reticent and uneasy to express themselves in public scenarios. As per Güvendir et al. (2020), Mehrpoor and Soeimani (2018), and Genc et al. (2016), incapable individuals are duplicitous, unmotivated, and uncommunicative. Social, economic, political, and intellectual dimensions of a human being's life are influenced by public speaking anxiety (Güvendir et al., 2020; Elani-Shirvan & Talebzadeh, 2020). Anxiety surrounding self-expressing and voicing in public has deleterious impacts on an individual's quality of life, their employment, and critical analysis. Coppinger and Sheridan (2022) reported that learners with public speaking anxiety articulate their ideas, initiatives, and knowledge in an amateurish and unprofessional manner. As indicated by the objective of this study, it is imperative to identify whether FLA determines the dissertation defense of Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates.

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

In light of considerations regarding the effects of FLA on the dissertation defense of Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates, the predominant objective of this study was to investigate the foreign language anxiety experienced by Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates during the process of their dissertation defense. The second study's purpose was to look into the relationship between Ph.D. candidates' gender differences and foreign language apprehension. The eventual objective was to investigate the association between Ph.D. candidates' major differences and foreign language anxiety.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

The primary focus of this study was on the perspectives of Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates' experiences and feelings of FLA whilst participating in and conducting their doctoral dissertation oral defense. In order to have a clearer overview of the role FLA contributes inside the learning of foreign languages, the three principal research questions were brought up:

- 1) Is there a substantial level of public speaking anxiety amongst Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates while delivering their dissertation oral defense presentation?
- 2) During the dissertation oral defense presentation, do substantial gender-based differences exist in Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates' experiences with public speaking anxiety?
- 3) During the dissertation oral defense presentation, are there noticeable differences in the public speaking anxiety experiences of Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates based on their diverse fields of study?

## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

Language anxiety has been extensively researched over the last several decades, leading to a wealth of new information and resources. As a result, it has had a direct effect on

language education, language employment, and retention of foreign languages (Chmarkh, 2022; Alqurashi & Althubaiti, 2021; Cui, 2020; Doff, 2018; Alaleh, 2018). This study was undertaken to acquire a broader understanding of the problem, particularly as it relates to the foreign language anxiety experienced by Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates during their dissertation oral defense presentations. Rarely, if ever, have studies pertaining to this issue been published. The results of this study potentially equip EFL postgraduates and instructors with elaboration and important details toward Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates' experiences of public speaking anxiety at dissertation oral defense presentation. The intensity to which Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates experience foreign language anxiety would be an essential aspect to consider and identify while devising strategies to alleviate this apprehensive discomfort. For instance, a Ph.D. candidate's FLA could exert a detrimental impact on their academic language development and dissertation defense performance.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Anxiety – Commonly-Seen Psychological Mental Disorder**

Diverse researchers conceptualize anxiety in a variety of ways. Anxiety has been variably associated with the concept of emotion marked by trepidation, fear, uncertainty, dread, or tension and concern about the likelihood towards something catastrophic occurring (Merriam-Webster, 2019; Pearson Education, 2014; Oxford University Press, 2011). Additionally, anxiety is the perceived sense of panic, nervousness, uneasiness, and problem coupled with abnormal brain nervous activity, according to Alnahidh and Altalhab (2020). Due to the detrimental consequences on human conduct, it makes sense that anxiety can be seen as a discrete psychological response from a vantage point of mental situation, and that is where the majority of this analysis dwells (Coppinger & Sheridan, 2022; Kiae et al., 2021). Psychotherapists and researchers, on the other side, attempt to categorize anxiety into several subgroups, including characteristic anxiety and transitory anxiety experiences. Conceivably, attribute anxiety is understood to be a typically continuous personality feature, whilst, according to the opinions of numerous academics, state anxiety refers to the situation-to-situation experience of uneasiness (Joyce-Deaulieu & Zabolski, 2020; Rachman, 2020; Kiel & Kalomiris, 2019).

In addition, He (2018) and Mierzwa (2019) widen the relevance of state anxiety as an assessment to incorporate the response to a particular anxiety-galvanized input. Consequently, language students who exhibit greater trait anxiety are far more likely to be apprehensive individuals with vulnerable mental health, strength of character, and consistency (Schalley & Eisenclas, 2020). Moreover, Horwitz and Young (1991) proposed a second type of fear: situation-specific anxiety. Upon analyzing several anxiety research fields, they ascertained that situation-specific anxiety, as hypothesized, appears to be an existing-moment sensation. In another sense, individuals with fundamentally distinctive personalities are more inclined to throw less attention on the circumstantial sources of apprehension, given that anxiety is a differentiating attribute of an individual

throughout various situations or occurrences (Narcy-Combes et al., 2019). Inside this preceding section, the researchers offered an explanatory and fundamental description of three forms of anxiety: trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situational anxiety, in connection to the psychological notion of anxiety. Evidently, anxiety serves as an integral role in each facet. Still, this investigation on anxiety prognosis in the scenario of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) explored mostly on foreign language anxiety. Given consideration of the above, the upcoming part should deliver a rather more comprehensive explanation of anxiety in an EFL context from the perspective of student individuals.

## **2.2 Anxiety throughout Foreign Language Context**

As per Horwitz and Young's (1991) definition, language anxiety would be a hallmark of language learning that generates dread amongst language learners. As evidenced by the results of two studies (Gkonou et al., 2017; Salehi & Marefat, 2014), most language learners would exhibit symptoms or uneasiness during the process of language learning, potentially exerting a substantial effect on language achievement. Moreover, according to Gregersen and Mercer (2021), anxiety emerges as a feeling of uneasiness, a vague apprehension tangentially correlated to a target. With this in mind, worry can be seen as an impediment to the achievement of a greater degree of accuracy in a foreign language among language learners (Dewaele & Li, 2021). As a matter of fact, it is unmistakable that language anxiety contributes correspondingly to one of the most widely used measures of language learning success (Satullaeva & Kurbanbaeva, 2020; Pecorari, 2018). Nonetheless, in the part that follows, an abundance of study evidence demonstrates indisputably the existence of anxiety in foreign language acquisition.

Foreign language anxiety could well be characterized psychologically as the tension and anxious feelings amongst language learners, as well as associated dispositions in foreign language contexts (Cui, 2020; Doff, 2018). As a psychological process, anxiety is described as a perceived sensation of dissatisfaction, pressure, unease, and worry, paired with the involvement of the autonomous nervous system (Pecorari, 2018; Alaleh, 2018). Theoretically, it would make logical sense for individuals with anxiety issues who are acquiring a second or foreign language to feel unsure or insecure amid circumstances whereby communicating in a second or foreign language sounds essential or demanded. Furthermore, as shown in the result obtained from Gok et al. (2021), trembling, unease, a speedy heart rate, distractions, carelessness, excessive perspiration, palpitations, and insomnia are classified as diagnostic characteristics of apprehensive individuals. Despite the detrimental effects of foreign language anxiety, the language competency of these language learners under this circumstance would inevitably turn inadequate. Predetermined study results have underscored scenario-specified anxiety that could have been assiduously considered and delineated in language-use surroundings in responding to certain possible causes for language learning anxiety (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2018; Vahedi & Fatemi, 2015). Thus, this current study aims to extend the dedication to another perspective of language anxiety – public

speaking anxiety throughout EFL-related context as well as anxiety in public occasions such as doctoral dissertation oral defense presentation.

### **2.3 Empirical Studies on Anxiety in Public Context or Relevant Social Circumstances**

Fear of speaking publicly represents one of the most prominent expressions of anxiety issues, which is a regular occurrence. Public speaking anxiety, as defined by Dewaele and Moskowitz (2020), refers to a type of communication apprehension or tension. Public presentation such as dissertation oral defense presentation is the center of this article. Anxiety sufferers often experience stress, uneasiness, discomfort, hesitation, and fear of making errors when requested to address a crowd or deliver a public demonstration. The classifications of public speaking anxiety involve interior discomfort, interaction evasion, disengagement, and profuse engagement (Attanayake, 2019; Aydin, 2017). To put that in another perspective, a person receives public speaking anxiety whenever he or she challenges his or her competencies to navigate the speaking conditions he or she is experiencing and, as a response, struggles to put more emphasis and grows distraught. Existing literature suggests that an individual with a strong sense of self-confidence but little public speaking anxiety is indeed the absolute reverse (Dastgoshadeh & Javanmardi, 2021; Al-Khotaba et al., 2019; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017).

In the contemporary generation, competent communication skills are vital for all of us. According to Motorchi and Ziafar (2020), correspondence has evolved into a defining attribute of social cohesion, social position, and occupational attributes, and the preponderance of lexical items is absorbed through this method. Experts are expected to display various talks to a diverse range of people during their professions. If individuals encounter public speaking anxiety, their employment may be imperiled as a consequence. Certain investigations claim that social anxiety is linked with variation in audience reaction and that this affects self-assurance and presentation skills (Rubio, 2020; Amalia et al., 2019; Szyszka, 2016). In an analysis of Su (2022), 72% of EFL participants have a moderate but significant phobia of delivering a speech amongst Chinese college students. Four out of ten participants detest public speaking more than suicide. The preponderance of therapists contemplates this fear to be paradoxical and readily resolved. In addition, students must acquire the vital competence of public communication skills in order to articulate insights and provide recommendations. However, Numerous learners; however, detest public verbal communication. Shen (2021) emphasizes that panic induces nervousness and deceptive behaviors that hamper academic success and accomplishment. In accordance with the San Francisco NIMH, 69 percent of the world's population is frightened of delivering or expressing themselves publicly (Hope et al., 2019). Li and Deawele's (2021) findings indicate that 77 percent of total Chinese college students were apprehensive regarding performing either minimal substantial public speeches, corroborating the outcomes of Qu's (2019) investigation, which reported that 75% of Chinese college students suffer substantial level of public speaking anxiety. Thus, anytime Chinese students are granted the opportunity to participate in open communication or talks, most regularly falter, freeze and become

hesitant. Once individuals progress in their academic pursuits, they seem to be far more likely to give presentations and address at meetups, symposium, and conventions, as well as contribute their opinions on current issues, hence expanding the demand for competencies in public speaking. Thanks to their public speaking despair, unfortunately, some experience advent of insomnia and agitation upon speaking before the crowd in public.

### 3. Material and Methods

#### 3.1 Participants

This research was undertaken with the contribution of sixty-eight Chinese Ph.D. candidates (N=68; Male = 38, 55.9%; Female = 30, 44.1%). As nothing more than a requirement for graduation, all Ph.D. candidates were obligated to take part in the college-arranged ultimate dissertation oral defense to demonstrate their complete doctorate dissertation work. Besides, PhD-ECE (Doctor of Philosophy in Electrical and Computer Engineering; N=21; 30.9%), PhD-KMIM (Doctor of Philosophy in Knowledge Management and Innovative Management; N=19; 27.9%), and PhD-GC (Doctor of Philosophy in Global Communication; N=28; 41.2%) were the doctoral degrees awarded by these Ph.D. candidates. Table 3.1 illustrates an overview of the participants' demographic statistical information.

**Table 3.1:** Overview of Demographic Information Regarding Study Participants

Demographic Categories	Frequency (Count, N)	Valid Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	38	55.9%
Female	30	44.1%
<b>Ph.D. Programs</b>		
PhD-ECE	21	30.9%
PhD-KMIM	19	27.9%
PhD-GC	28	41.2%

**Note:** PhD-ECE (Doctor of Philosophy in Electrical and Computer Engineering); PhD-KMIM (Doctoral of Philosophy in Knowledge Management and Innovative Management); Ph.D.-GC (Doctoral of Philosophy in Global Communication)

#### 3.2 Research Instrument

Throughout the proposed investigation, the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA), a 34-item scale constructed by McCroskey (1970) to examine anxiety about public speaking, served as the principal research instrument. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The original-version PRPSA consists of 22 items to be expressed negatively, such as "I feel anxious while awaiting my speech," and 12 items to be stated favorably, such as "I like speech preparation." As all data were processed, items that made sense on the PRPSA were converted to high scores, which always indicated a greater degree of public speaking anxiety. Cronbach's alpha for the scale varies from 0.84 to 0.94, signifying that the

questionnaire has a fairly strong level of internal consistency (McCroskey 1970; Gufriyansyah & Khairani, 2019; Hope et al., 2019; Dueas et al., 2018; Bartholomay & Houlihan, 2016;). By contrast, for the design and aim of this present analysis, the researcher altered the initial form of the PRPSA by transforming all 34 questions into adverse statements. In particular, the word "public speech" in the original PRPSA has been amended to "dissertation oral defense presentation" as parts of the modified-version PRPSA. On the basis of the following categorical variables: public speaking anxiety, self-control management, and fear of negative evaluation, a completely revised version of the PRPSA encompassing all questions was developed as shown in Appendix 1.

### 3.3 Pilot Test

In May 2022, the researcher administered the English-version PRPSA to the recruited thirty post-graduate students at random to complete the questionnaires for the pilot test. After collecting all returned surveys, SPSS Statistics version 25.0 was used to analyze the respondents' reliability. Throughout the pilot research, the modification of the PRPSA has been seen with an internal consistency coefficient of .813 (Cronbach's alpha, N = 30), demonstrating its internal reliability. Consequently, the modified PRPSA was considered to indicate promising validity and reliability among all thirty-four items.

**Table 3.3:** Pilot Test of the Modified PRPSA

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on standardized items	N of Items
.813	.832	30

### 3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

This research was conducted between August and December of 2022. The researcher in July 2022 compiled a list of postgraduate students for data collection. These postgraduates enrolled to attend the oral defense of their PhD dissertations in early June of the same year. From August to December 2022, these Ph.D. candidates from three distinct doctoral programs completed the oral defense of their dissertations. On the day of the dissertation oral defense, the researcher administered a questionnaire to participants based on the list of Ph.D. presenters and their respective areas of specialization, immediately following their dissertation oral defense presentations. Each Ph.D. candidate took an average of over 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. In all, sixty-eight questionnaires were collected, and all of them were deemed to have valid responses. After collecting all of the completed questionnaires, the data were subjected to quantitative analysis. To be more precise, Minitab version 21.0 was used to evaluate quantitatively the responses of each participant to the 34 questionnaire questions on the modified version of the PRPSA survey. In the following part of the study results, the outcomes for each item and the mean score for each category variable were provided in result section below.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Holistically and Analytically High Public Speaking Anxiety Detected

Table 4.1 underlines that, in response to the first research question, "Is there a substantial level of public speaking anxiety amongst Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates while delivering their dissertation oral defense presentation?" Ph.D. candidate participants in this study, holistically across all three categorical variables, acknowledged on average a substantially high degree of speaking anxiety ( $X = 4.34$ ) during their dissertation defense. During the presentation of their dissertations, the Ph.D. candidate participants as well exhibited a significant amount of public speaking anxiety. This was determined by conducting an in-depth statistical analysis of individual categorical factors, such as public speaking apprehension ( $X=4.40$ ), self-behavior management ( $X=4.35$ ), and fear of adverse assessment ( $X=4.26$ ).

**Table 4.1:** Ph.D. Candidate's Experiences with Public Speaking Anxiety toward Dissertation Defense

Categorical Variable: Public Speaking Apprehension (PSA)														
Count	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	Ave.  4.40
Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
StDev	0.91	0.88	0.65	0.85	0.97	0.89	0.74	0.65	0.72	0.58	0.69	0.62		
Mean	4.15	4.32	4.28	4.23	4.88	4.65	3.89	4.53	4.68	4.22	4.58	4.41		
Categorical Variable: Self-Behavior Management (SBM)														
Count	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	Ave.  4.35
Item	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	
StDev	0.78	0.63	0.52	0.96	0.87	0.63	0.69	0.42	0.64	0.81	0.77	0.99	0.89	
Mean	4.65	4.22	4.05	4.15	4.73	4.52	4.42	4.13	3.87	4.26	4.32	4.87	4.72	
Categorical Variable: Fear of Adverse Assessment (FAA)														
Count	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	Ave.  4.26				
Item	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34					
StDev	0.57	0.72	0.81	0.79	0.53	0.83	0.75	0.90	0.84					
Mean	4.22	4.36	4.58	4.65	4.01	3.67	4.15	4.33	4.40					
Total Categorical Variables Average (PSA+SBM+FAA)														
													<b>4.34</b>	

Moreover, the study results suggest that out of the total of 34 items on the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA), fifteen of those items, including six items from public speaking apprehension (item 5,6,8,9,11,12), six items from self-behavior management (items 13,17,18,19,24,25), and three items from fear of adverse assessment (items 28,29,34) indicated the strongest degree of public speaking anxiety experienced by Ph.D. candidates during their dissertation defense, and the items with the highest-degree public speaking anxiety referred to the mean scores that are either higher than or close to 4.50. Table 4. enumerates a comprehensive summary of the analysis.

**Table 4.2:** Items with the Strongest Public Speaking Anxiety Pertaining the Dissertation Defense

Variables	Item	Mean
Public Speaking Apprehension	Item 5: I get anxious if someone asks me something about my topic knowledge that I do not know.	4.88
	Item 6: My mind is uncertain when giving a conference presentation	4.65
	Item 8: While performing my dissertation oral defense presentation, I feel troubled in control of my feelings of tension.	4.53
	Item 9: When I make a mistake during my conference presentation, I find it hard to concentrate on the parts that follow.	4.68
	Item 11: I feel shortness of breathing while I perform my dissertation oral defense presentation.	4.58
	Item 12: While performing my dissertation oral defense presentation, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.	4.41
Self-Behavior Management	Item 13: While preparing for giving a conference presentation, I feel nervous.	4.65
	Item 17: I seldom look forward to giving a conference presentation.	4.73
	Item 18: I get anxious when I think about a conference presentation coming up.	4.52
	Item 19: I always have some fear of performing my dissertation oral defense presentation.	4.42
	Item 24: Realizing that only a little time remains in a conference presentation makes me very anxious.	4.87
	Item 25: I have trouble falling asleep the night before a conference presentation.	4.72
Fear of Adverse Assessment	Item 28: I feel anxious when the conference commentator announces the results of my conference presentation.	4.58
	Item 29: I feel anxious during the process of waiting for my conference presentation outcomes.	4.65
	Item 34: I feel uncomfortable and tensioned for an hour or so just after finishing my dissertation oral defense presentation.	4.40

**Note:** Items with the greatest degree of PSA have mean scores that exceed or are closest to 4.50.

## 4.2 Gender Variations and Public Speaking Anxiety

In order to answer the second research question, which was, "Do substantial gender-based differences exist in Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates' experiences with public speaking anxiety during the dissertation oral defense presentation," the t-test results for all participants (N=68) are presented in Table 4.3. These findings suggest that there was not a statistically significant difference found between the genders of the Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidate participants' and their levels of public speaking anxiety at the .05 level of significance. This was evidenced by the absence of a significant relationship between gender differences and public speaking anxiety among Chinese Ph.D. candidates presenting their dissertation defenses.

**Table 4.3:** Gender Differences & Chinese Ph.D.  
 Candidates' Experiences of PSA toward Dissertation Defense

t-test						
95% Confidence Interval of the Difference						
	Mean	SD	Lower	Upper	T	P: Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	.06235	.85748	-.47354	.37845	-.357	.489*
Female						

**Notes:** The test value is significant at the 0.05 level,  $p > .05$ .

### 4.3 Diversities in Academic Specialization and Public Speaking Anxiety

In an attempt to resolve the third research question, which was "During the dissertation oral defense presentation, are there noticeable differences in the public speaking anxiety experiences of Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates based on their diverse fields of study?," Table 4.4 reveals that no statistically significant difference at the .05 level of significance was ended up finding between Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates' diversities in their academic specializations ( $F = .286$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

**Table 4.4:** Academic Study Differences & Chinese EFL  
 Ph.D. Experiences of PSA toward Dissertation Defense

t-test						
95% Confidence Interval of the Difference						
	Mean	SD	Lower	Upper	t	P: Sig. (2-tailed)
PhD-ECE						
PhD-KMIM	-.05327	.29396	-.28792	.09535	-.538	.286*
PhD-GC						

**Notes:** The test value is significant at the 0.05 level,  $p > .05$

PhD-ECE (Doctor of Philosophy in Electrical & Computer Engineering)

PhD-KMIM (Doctoral of Philosophy in Knowledge Management & Innovative Management)

Ph.D.-GC (Doctoral of Philosophy in Global Communication)

## 5. Discussion

The intention of this study was to determine and analyze the experiences of Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates with public speaking anxiety in connection to their dissertation oral defenses. All categorical variables, including public speaking apprehension, self-behavior management, and fear of adverse assessment, exhibited a high level of public speaking anxiety in reference to dissertation defense presentations among Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates. The outcomes from the current empirical study supply insight into the applicability and relevance of broadening our understanding of Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates' experiences with a high level of public speaking anxiety in relation to dissertation defense presentations. Alberth (2022) emphasizes that the concept underpinning apprehension or context-specific anxiety is typically related to a particular circumstance in which the speaker would utilize a second language in which the individual is not completely proficient. Learners of Asian, especially Chinese students speaking Mandarin as their native language, sometimes suffer discomfort while

communicating in English. Particularly, the influence of Confucian ideology on the encouragement of spectacular flawless performance among Chinese students could potentially lead to high level of anxiety (Tang, 2022; Zheng & Cheng, 2018; Yin & Wang, 2017). Students of Chinese nationality are fearful of making mistakes and being humiliated, causing them to be exceptionally frightened while speaking in public (Zheng & Cheng, 2018; Shao et al., 2013).

Additionally, presenting in front of a group or the general populace has traditionally been a communication and linguistic impediment. Due to embarrassment, shivering voices, a racing pulse, sensations of discomfort, an inferiority complex, and a loss of confidence, students managed to eschew public speaking (Gok et al., 2021; Güvendir et al., 2020; Gkonou et al., 2017). In other words, making speeches and presentations in public and in front of massive gatherings has been a herculean task for them. Communication apprehension is a variety of timidity characterized by an anxiety-driven phobia of interacting with other individuals. Communication apprehension has also been categorised as listener-based apprehension, context-based apprehension, and situational apprehension (Joyce-Beaulieu & Zaboski, 2020). Concerns with conveying in groups (verbal and nonverbal anxiety), in public (communication apprehension or onstage fright), or with hearing to or understanding a spoken foreign language message (receiver anxiety) may be indicators or markers of public communication anxiety (Hope et al., 2019; Hope, 2018).

On a final note, the outcomes of this study underline that gender distinctions and graduate academic specialty appear not to exert a remarkable impact on Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates' experiences with public speaking anxiety prior to their dissertation defense presentations. But even so, these latest discoveries seem to contradict previous study that found a high association between gender and public speaking anxiety, but no significant gender impact on public speaking (German, 2020; Lestari et al., 2017; Elmenfi & Gaibani, 2016). These varied results may be partially ascribed to the fact academic levels of involvement and academic circumstances utilized to assess the public speaking anxiety of students. In previous experiments, the researchers recruited EFL undergraduate and graduate students as participants. However, the preponderance of students in this research were Chinese EFL doctoral candidates. Depending on their educational abilities, level of maturity, language barrier, lack of confidence in expressing themselves in a foreign language, and performance pressure, students at higher academic levels, particularly doctoral students, may possess a spectrum of responses to public speaking anxiety (Cai & Cheung, 2021; Endahati, 2020; Russell, 2020; Hope et al., 2019; Ubaedillah, 2019; Syahyuri, 2018; Buckley, 2018). The present research, by contrast, centered on the experiences of Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates with public speaking anxiety in relation to their dissertation oral defense presentation, as opposed to the broader traditional classroom of those earlier studies. In other respects, communication in English for professional and academic needs and purposes in a major, public academic setting, such as a dissertation defense seminar, could differ significantly from that in an ESL classroom with a small, comfortable audience. From the other perspective, owing to

the paucity of relevant studies and literature about varied educational backgrounds or experiences, there would be an urgent need for expanded research into more diversified doctorate study concentrations as the principal distinction.

## 6. Conclusion

Numerous difficulties relating to the experiences of Chinese EFL Ph.D. candidates with public speaking anxiety toward dissertation defense presentations have been uncovered by the current study, which requires additional investigation and exploration. With this regard, the demand for academic public speaking capabilities is also on the rise since as academic individuals or professionals progress and advance through their career paths. These academic postgraduates are more likely to present and participate in considerable discussions for all potential academic scenarios expressing their opinions on the subject at hand in the upcoming years. As a consequence of their apprehension of public speaking, however, some individuals may experience sleep issues, anxiety, irritability, and other unfavorable emotional outbursts while addressing the audience in public. Numerous investigations have been undertaken to examine the origins and causes of public speaking anxiety, as well as to develop strategies and tactics for coping with and tackling this problem. Consequently, it would be beneficial to analyze and scrutinize further the strategy used amongst graduates to conquer their fear of academic public speaking, and this competence should be incorporated into the course design or learning goals in order to accelerate and achieve higher graduate educational success

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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## Appendix 1: Supplementary Materials

### Modified Version of Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety Scale

<b>Categorical Variable 1: Public Speaking Apprehension</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. My thoughts become jumbled when I am performing my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>2. My hands tremble when I am performing my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>3. I feel agitated while performing my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>4. I am in constant fear of forgetting what I prepared to say during my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>5. I get anxious if someone asks me something about my dissertation topic knowledge that I don't know.</li> <li>6. My mind is uncertain when performing my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>7. My heart beats very fast just as I start my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>8. While performing my dissertation oral defense presentation, I feel troubled in control of my feelings of tension.</li> <li>9. When I make a mistake during my oral defense presentation, I find it hard to concentrate on the parts that follow.</li> <li>10. During performing my dissertation oral defense, I experience a feeling of helplessness building up inside me.</li> <li>11. I feel shortness of breathing while I perform my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>12. While performing my dissertation oral defense presentation, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.</li> </ol>
<b>Categorical Variable 2: Self-Behavior Management</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. While preparing for performing my dissertation oral defense presentation, I feel nervous.</li> <li>14. I feel tense when I see the words dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>15. I feel worried when I am told to perform my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>16. I am nervous just before performing my oral defense, but I still do not feel calm during my defense presentation.</li> <li>17. I seldom look forward to performing my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>18. I get anxious when I think about my dissertation oral defense presentation coming up.</li> <li>19. I always have some fear of performing my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>20. When the moderator announces my turn for my dissertation defense presentation, I can feel myself getting tense.</li> <li>21. I do not enjoy preparing for my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>22. I do dread to perform my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>23. I perspire just before starting my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>24. Realizing that only a little time remains in my dissertation oral defense presentation makes me very anxious.</li> <li>25. I have trouble falling asleep the night before my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> </ol>
<b>Categorical Variable 2: Fear of Adverse Assessment</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26. Right after performing my dissertation oral defense presentation, I feel that I have had an unpleasant experience.</li> <li>27. I feel performing a poorer dissertation oral defense presentation because I am anxious.</li> <li>28. I feel anxious when the dissertation commentator announces the results of my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>29. I feel anxious during the process of waiting my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>30. I experience considerable anxiety while sitting in the conference room just after my dissertation oral defense.</li> <li>31. I breathe faster just after finishing my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> <li>32. I face the discouraged toward performing my dissertation oral defense presentation.</li> </ol>

33. I feel that I am losing the complete possession of myself after my dissertation oral defense presentation.
34. I feel uncomfortable and tensioned in the hour or so just after finishing my dissertation oral defense presentation.

**Note:** Adapted from McCroskey's (1970) version.

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