

## **SPEAKING UP IN TVET: A REVIEW OF ORAL PRESENTATION DIFFICULTIES FACED BY MALAYSIAN POLYTECHNIC STUDENTS**

**KANISELVI A/P ARASU <sup>1\*</sup>, DR.SRIRAJ DURAILIMGAM <sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Politeknik Ungku Omar,  
31400 Ipoh Perak, Malaysia.

<sup>2</sup>Institut Pendidikan Guru IPG Ipoh,  
31150 Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.

\*Corresponding Author's Email [kaniselvi@puo.edu.my](mailto:kaniselvi@puo.edu.my)

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### **Abstract**

Oral presentation skills have emerged as a core employability skill for TVET graduates across all educational systems, including Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). In Malaysia, where polytechnics and vocational institutions are important in producing technically skilled graduates, communication and presentation skills are increasingly emphasized as part of holistic student development. This article review synthesizes empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025 that examine oral presentation challenges experienced by Malaysian TVET and polytechnic students. A total of five empirical studies met the inclusion criteria. The findings reveal three dominant categories of barriers: (i) psychological challenges such as communication apprehension, public speaking anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation; (ii) linguistic limitations including restricted vocabulary, grammatical weaknesses, and dependence on memorised scripts; and (iii) contextual and pedagogical constraints such as limited exposure to authentic speaking opportunities, culturally influenced communication norms, and difficulties arising from online or hybrid presentation formats during and after the COVID-19 period. These barriers often interact, with low English proficiency contributing to increasing anxiety levels and subsequently impairing clarity, delivery, and message organization. Although interventions such as scaffolded speaking tasks, video-based rehearsal, and peer-supported feedback show potential, current research lacks longitudinal evidence on their sustained impact. Additionally, few studies examine employer expectations regarding communication competence among TVET graduates. Addressing these gaps and strengthening structured oral communication training within TVET curricula is essential to enhance students' confidence, communicative competence, and workplace readiness.

**Keywords** *Oral presentation, TVET, Malaysian polytechnic students, communication apprehension.*



## 1.0 Introduction

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has become an important matter in preparing a skilled workforce that meets Malaysia's evolving economic demands. While TVET institutions prioritise technical competencies, soft skills particularly oral communication are increasingly recognized as essential for graduate employability, workplace performance, and long-term career development (Hamid et al., 2023; Balakrishnan et al., 2025). According to Halik Bassah and Mohd Asri Mohd Noor (2023) many TVET graduates have issues delivering their thoughts successfully and lack of confidence. In professional and industrial settings, the ability to present ideas clearly, communicate technical information, and engage an audience is now a main expectation for TVET graduates.

Despite this recognition, evidence consistently shows that Malaysian polytechnic students face significant challenges in oral presentation tasks. Studies report persistent issues such as communication apprehension, presentation anxiety, limited linguistic proficiency, and difficulty structuring content (Kho & Ting, 2023; Cng, Chan, & Saufi, 2025). Recent findings further show that higher speaking anxiety is associated with lower perceived employability, suggesting that these communication barriers may have long-term consequences for students' career readiness (Balakrishnan et al., 2025).

Within Malaysian polytechnics specifically, students with lower English proficiency and minimal presentation experience tend to report higher anxiety and apprehension (Kho & Ting, 2023). More exact research has examined situational, audience-based, and trait based components of this anxiety (Kho & Ting, 2024), indicating that oral presentation challenges arise from interrelated linguistic, psychological, and contextual factors.

### Research Gap and Rationale for the Review

Although studies on communication anxiety and oral presentation skills exist, no recent review synthesis post-pandemic evidence (2020–2025) focusing on Malaysian TVET and polytechnic contexts. The learning disruptions, shifts to online/hybrid instruction, and reduced face-to-face practice during the COVID-19 period introduced new and intensified challenges that have not been systematically consolidated. Moreover, prior research rarely connects these challenges directly to employability outcomes, despite growing national emphasis on industry ready graduates.

Therefore, this review directs a diagnostic gap by integrating the most recent empirical findings to understand the nature, causes, and implications of oral presentation difficulties among Malaysian TVET students. Specifically, the review aims to:



1. Examine empirical evidence (2020–2025) on psychological, linguistic, and contextual barriers to oral presentation performance.
2. Identify how these factors interact and influence students' readiness for workplace communication.
3. Highlight gaps in existing research and propose pedagogical and institutional strategies to strengthen communication training in TVET settings.

The guiding questions for this review are:

- What are the primary barriers affecting TVET/polytechnic students' oral presentation performance?
- How do psychological, linguistic, and contextual factors interact?
- What interventions or strategies have been implemented in Malaysian contexts?
- What gaps remain, particularly in relation to employability and post-pandemic readiness?

Given Malaysia's emphasis on enhancing graduate employability and the 21st-century workplace demand for strong communication competencies, this review both timely and necessary. By synthesizing the latest research, it provides clearer insight into the challenges faced by TVET students and proposes evidence-informed recommendations for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers.

## **2. 0 Literature Review**

The importance of oral presentation competence in Malaysia's "Technical and Vocational Education and Training" (TVET) sector has grown steadily as industries demand graduates who can articulate technical knowledge with confidence (Bassah & Noor, 2023). However, research published between 2020 and 2025 consistently demonstrates that many Malaysian TVET and polytechnic students struggle with oral presentations due to interrelated psychological, linguistic, and contextual factors similar to challenges reported globally in TVET systems.

### **1. Psychological Factors: Communication Apprehension and Anxiety**

Communication apprehension remains one of the most occurring issue to effective oral presentation performance. In the Malaysian context, Kho and Ting (2023) found that students with lower English proficiency reported significantly higher stages of presentation anxiety, because nervousness over negative evaluation. These findings mirror international patterns, where TVET learners in countries such as China, Indonesia, and South Africa also report anxiety related to peer judgement and perceived incompetence (Xethakis et



al., 2024).

Extending their work, Kho and Ting (2024) showed that apprehension is different dimension according to audience size, familiarity, and situational context. This aligns with global studies indicating that technical students often feel confident in hands on tasks but anxious when required to verbally justify or explain technical processes (Wilang, 2023).

Balakrishnan et al. (2025) further linked presentation anxiety to reduced self-perceived employability, suggesting that psychological barriers not only reduce classroom performance but shape students' confidence in job interviews and workplace communication. Similar relationships are documented internationally, reinforcing that presentation anxiety has broad career implications for technical graduates (Hand, 2023).

Synthesis: Across studies, anxiety emerges as a *core, cross-cutting issue* that amplifies other barriers. Malaysian findings match global trends: technical students consistently lack confidence in high-stakes communication situations, indicating the need for psychological support and targeted oral training.

## **2. Linguistic Barriers: Proficiency, Expressiveness, and Code-Switching**

Linguistic limitations remain a main challenge for Malaysian TVET students, particularly those from rural or non-English-speaking backgrounds. Chang, Chan, and Saufi (2025) observed that students frequently rely on memorised scripts due to limited vocabulary and expressive ability, resulting in rigid and disengaging delivery. Similar issues appear internationally, where TVET learners often struggle to translate technical terminology into fluent spoken English (Dewanto et al., 2024).

Kho and Ting (2023) additionally noted that linguistic weaknesses frequently trigger psychological anxiety, illustrating the two way connection between proficiency and confidence. Errors in grammar and pronunciation reinforced avoidance behaviours, creating a cycle of low participation.

Code-switching emerged as another coping strategy, where students mix English with Malay or local dialects (Musa et al., 2023). This temporarily reduces anxiety, lecturers perceived it as unprofessional (Khoo & Ting, 2022) a tension also found in global research, where multilingual TVET learners must balance authenticity with workplace expectations.

Synthesis: Linguistic barriers do not exist independently; they reflect with psychological factors. Low proficiency increases anxiety, which in turn reduces willingness to practise and improve. Both Malaysian and global studies highlight the need for integrated language communication pedagogies rather than isolated language drills.



### 3. Contextual Challenges: Pedagogical, Digital, and Institutional Factors

Pedagogical and institutional conditions significantly shape TVET students' oral presentation outcomes. Locally, many programmes continue to prioritise technical assessments over communication tasks (Ch'ng et al., 2025), limiting students' exposure to structured speaking practice. Internationally, report similar challenges: oral communication is often treated as secondary to hands on training (Husin et al., 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic added further difficulty. Khoo and Ting (2022) described "virtual presentation anxiety," where students felt increased stress presenting on camera without immediate audience feedback. Poor connectivity and unfamiliar digital tools also lower performance. Comparable findings worldwide show that TVET students struggled with digital oral communication due to limited technological access and minimal training (Lukashe et al., 2024).

Institutional culture plays a substantial role. Some Malaysian polytechnics treat oral presentations as low stakes, resulting in limited student preparation (Balakrishnan et al., 2025). Globally, a mismatch exists between employer expectations and institutional assessment priorities employers demand confident communicators, yet many TVET programmes show less focus on communication training (Kiruthiga & Christopher, 2024).

Synthesis: Malaysian contextual challenges reflect a broader international pattern: technical-focused institutions often overlook communication practice, creating systemic barriers that reinforce students' anxiety and linguistic limitations.

### 4. Interventions and Pedagogical Responses

A range of pedagogical strategies have been proposed to strengthen oral communication skills. Kho and Ting (2024) emphasised scaffolded speaking tasks, moving students gradually from informal discussions to formal presentations. This approach aligns with international recommendations advocating "progressive exposure" to reduce performance anxiety.

Technology-enhanced learning has shown promise. Ch'ng et al. (2025) reported that video-recorded presentations help students practise and self-evaluate without real-time pressure. Similar findings in other countries demonstrate that asynchronous feedback can build confidence and promote reflection.

Balakrishnan et al. (2025) highlighted the benefits of simulated interviews and workplace role plays, which mirror global best practices in competency-based training models.

Peer assessment strategies (Khoo & Ting, 2023) also reduce anxiety by fostering a supportive environment a pattern reinforced by international



studies showing that peerled feedback normalises mistakes and humanises the learning process.

**Synthesis:** Effective interventions share two qualities: (1) gradual exposure to speaking tasks, and (2) supportive environments that reduce the fear of judgement. These approaches are consistent internationally and offer evidence-based solutions for TVET institutions.

## 5. Remaining Gaps

Despite progress, several gaps persist:

- **Lack of longitudinal research.** Most Malaysian studies are cross-sectional, echoing global concerns about the absence of long-term tracking of communication development.
- **Limited employer perspective.** Few studies explore how employers evaluate TVET graduates' presentation skills, leaving a mismatch between student perceptions and workplace expectations.
- **Underrepresentation of rural institutions.** Research is disproportionately urban an issue also seen globally, where rural TVET contexts are understudied.
- **Minimal cross-country comparisons.** There is limited engagement with international TVET communication research, reducing the global relevance of Malaysian findings.

## Synthesis and Overall Conclusion

Across the 2020–2025 literature, three overarching themes emerge. First, Malaysian TVET students face multifaceted oral presentation challenges psychological, linguistic, and contextual that mirror global findings. Second, these challenges are interconnected, forming a cycle where low proficiency increase anxiety, and limited institutional support restricts opportunities for improvement. Third, while interventions such as scaffolded tasks, technological tools, and peer assessment show promise, stronger and longitudinal research is needed to evaluate their sustained impact.

This synthesis highlights the urgent need for Malaysian TVET institutions to adopt structured communication training that aligns with global TVET practices while addressing local contextual realities. Strengthening oral competence is no longer optional it is important to academic success, workplace readiness, and employability in a competitive technical workforce.



### 3.0 Methodology

This study embraces a narrative literature review style to synthesise recent empirical findings on oral presentation difficulties among Malaysian Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and polytechnic students. The review directs on studies published from 2020 to 2025, enabling a post-pandemic perspective while capturing the most current research trends.

#### 3.1 Search Strategy

A structured search was done across multiple academic records, including Scopus, Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis Online, and Malaysian-indexed platforms such as MyCite and MyJurnal. Search terms were used in various combinations, employing Boolean operators (AND/OR):

- “oral presentation”
- “public speaking anxiety”
- “communication apprehension”
- “TVET Malaysia”
- “polytechnic students”
- “graduate employability”

Manual backward reference checking was also conducted to identify additional relevant studies.

#### 3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure significance and value the following inclusion criteria were applied:

1. Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020–2025.
2. Studies focusing specifically on Malaysian TVET or polytechnic students.
3. Empirical research addressing oral presentation, communication apprehension, public speaking anxiety, or related employability skills.
4. Articles available in English.

Exclusion criteria included:

1. Studies outside the Malaysian context.
2. Articles focusing on school level learners or non-TVET tertiary students.



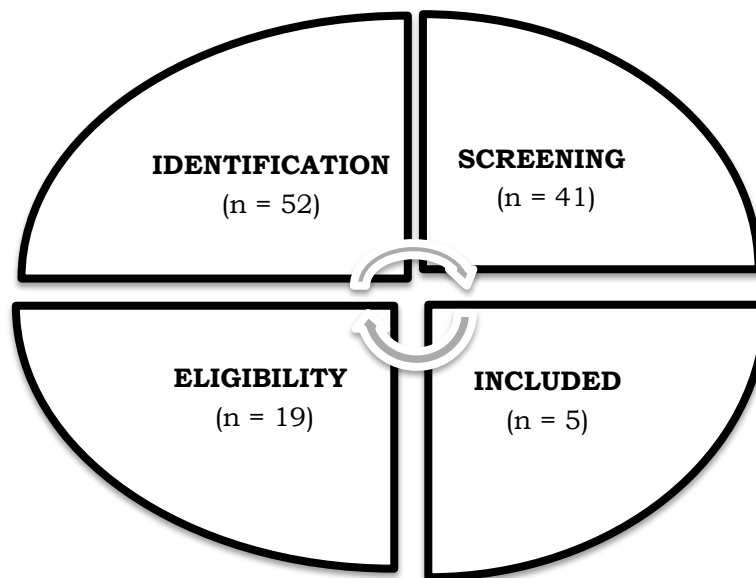
3. Non-peer-reviewed materials such as opinion papers, editorials, or non-empirical conference proceedings.

### 3.3 Selection and Screening Process

The search initially identified 52 articles. After removing duplicates, 34 articles were selected. A total of 19 articles were shortlisted for full-text review, of which 5 studies met all inclusion criteria.

The selection procedure followed a PRISMA style flow process (adapted for narrative reviews), enhancing transparency by documenting the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages (Page et al., 2021).

*Figure 1 : PRISMA-style flow process*



### 3.4 Quality Assessment and Reliability Measures

To address the reviewer's request for quality evaluation, the following steps were implemented:

Peer-review Status as Quality Baseline

Only peer-reviewed studies were included, ensuring a foundational level of academic quality.



## Methodological Quality Check

Each study was evaluated using a simplified checklist adapted for narrative reviews, covering:

- Clarity of research objectives
- Appropriateness of study design (e.g., survey, interview, experimental)
- Transparency of sampling procedures
- Validity of instruments used
- Depth and clarity of data analysis

Studies with unclear methodology or insufficient reporting were excluded.

## Bias Mitigation

To reduce bias:

- Inclusion/exclusion decisions were based strictly on predefined criteria.
- Studies from a variety of institutions and Malaysian regions were considered to avoid geographical bias.
- Both qualitative and quantitative studies were included, which minimises methodological bias.
- Findings were cross-checked for consistency, and contradictory evidence was noted explicitly (reported in the literature review section).

## 3.5 Data Extraction and Analysis

Data extracted from each study included:

- Author(s), year
- Research aim
- Sample characteristics
- Methodology
- Key findings related to oral presentation challenges

A thematic analysis was applied to recognise recurring themes and cross-study designs. The findings grouped into:

1. Psychological barriers (anxiety, fear of evaluation)



2. Linguistic challenges (limited proficiency, grammatical accuracy)
3. Contextual and pedagogical barriers (instructional practices, institutional expectations, online learning transitions)

This thematic categorisation enabled a synthesised, comparative interpretation rather than a simple summary, consistent with narrative review standards.

## 4.0 Results and Discussion

The reviewed studies provide consistent evidence that Malaysian higher education students particularly those in TVET and polytechnic experience considerable levels of oral presentation anxiety. Kho and Ting (2023) found that English expertise and oral presentation experience strongly predicted communication anxiety. Learners with limited exposure to English medium speaking tasks reported higher anxiety, which subsequently affected their delivery, fluency, and clarity during presentations. This aligns with Balakrishnan et al. (2025), who showed that speaking anxiety negatively influences students' self-perceived employability, as learners who feel less confident in oral communication view themselves as insufficiently prepared for workplace expectations.

### Why Linguistic Barriers Persist Despite Curricular Emphasis

Although English is formally emphasised within TVET curricula, the reviewed studies indicate that linguistic challenges persist for several reasons:

1. Insufficient continuous speaking exposure: Most TVET programmes prioritise technical competencies, resulting in minimal structured opportunities to practise English orally. When oral presentation tasks appear only occasionally in a semester, students cannot build the fluency required to reduce communication apprehension.
2. Mismatch between curriculum design and classroom reality: While syllabi may emphasise English communication, classroom implementation often prioritises written assessments or technical demonstrations (Ch'ng et al., 2025). This leads to a *theoretical* emphasis on speaking without *practical* reinforcement.
3. Sociolinguistic environment: Many TVET learners come from communities where English is rarely used in daily life. This creates a gap between institutional language expectations and students' linguistic realities, maintaining long-standing proficiency challenges.

### Interaction Effects: How Low Proficiency Amplifies Anxiety

Across all reviewed studies, a recurring theme is the *interaction* between linguistic barriers and psychological factors.



- Students with low proficiency tend to fear making grammatical or pronunciation errors (Kho & Ting, 2023).
- This fear triggers heightened anxiety, especially when presenting to peers or lecturers.
- High anxiety then further limits students' ability to speak spontaneously, causing heavy reliance on memorised scripts (Ch'ng, Chan, & Saufi, 2025).
- Script dependence leads to monotonous delivery, reduced eye contact, and weaker audience engagement quality that lecturers often perceive as lack of preparedness rather than anxiety related behaviour.

Thus, language and anxiety do not operate independently; they reinforce one another in a negative cycle that restricts presentation performance.

### **Contextual Factors: Why Anxiety Varies by Presentation Mode**

Khoo and Ting (2022) noted that online presentations during the COVID-19 pandemic produced mixed responses.

- Some students felt *less visible*, reducing performance pressure.
- Others experienced *heightened nervousness* due to technological issues and lack of immediate audience feedback, which created uncertainty about audience reactions.

Face-to-face presentations, however, remain the primary source of fear because students perceive them as important events requiring formal English, professional behaviour, and real-time interaction conditions that indicate existing linguistic insecurities.

### **Coping Strategies and the Gap in Formal Interventions**

Students commonly used rehearsal, preparation, and peer support to cope with presentation anxiety. While these strategies provide temporary relief, the reviewed literature shows a clear absence of structured institutional interventions that systematically target communication apprehension. This creates a pedagogical gap where individual effort replaces institutional responsibility. Therefore intervention like TED-based learning encourages modelling of effective speaking, storytelling, voice modulation, and audience engagement (Patty, 2024). TED provides repeated, low pressure opportunities to observe and practise presentation skills, helping students overcome linguistic and psychological barriers simultaneously (Tran & Nguyen, 2024).

### **Implications for Policy and Curriculum Design**

The findings suggest several key implications:



1. Integrate sustained speaking practice across the semester:

Oral communication must be embedded as a recurring outcome in multiple modules not confined to isolated assignments. Regular low pressure speaking tasks can gradually reduce anxiety.

2. Strengthen institutional support for communication training: TVET institutions should establish communication labs, peer-coaching programmes, and structured speaking workshops similar to university writing centres.
3. Adopt interactive, model-based pedagogies: TED-style activities, simulated interviews (Balakrishnan et al., 2025), and rehearsal-based video assessments (Ch'ng et al., 2025) can provide scaffolded exposure to public speaking.
4. Align communication outcomes with employability expectations: Since employers demand graduates who can articulate technical concepts clearly, curriculum designers must ensure that oral communication rubrics reflect real workplace tasks such as pitching, briefings, and project reporting.
5. Address rural urban area learners: Students from non-English speaking backgrounds may require differentiated support, including language modules or supplemental English speaking modules.



Table 1 : Summary of the findings

Theme	Summary	Key Sources
<b>Presentation Anxiety</b>	High anxiety affects fluency, clarity, and delivery; strongly linked to low English proficiency.	Kho & Ting (2023); Balakrishnan et al. (2025)
<b>Linguistic Barriers</b>	Limited English exposure and low proficiency persist despite curricular emphasis.	Kho & Ting (2023); Ch'ng et al. (2025)
<b>Curriculum–Practice Gap</b>	Speaking is emphasised in theory but classroom practice prioritises written or technical tasks.	Ch'ng et al. (2025)
<b>Sociolinguistic Factors</b>	Students from non-English environments lack opportunities to practise, reinforcing anxiety.	Kho & Ting (2023)
<b>Proficiency–Anxiety Cycle</b>	Fear of errors → anxiety → script reading → weak delivery; both factors reinforce each other.	Kho & Ting (2023); Ch'ng et al. (2025)
<b>Presentation Mode Effects</b>	Online reduces pressure for some; face-to-face creates higher anxiety due to formality and real-time interaction.	Khoo & Ting (2022)
<b>Coping Approaches</b>	Rehearsal, memorisation, and peer support help but provide only temporary relief.	Kho & Ting (2023)
<b>Pedagogical Gaps &amp; Solutions</b>	Lack of formal interventions; model-based strategies (TED, interviews, video tasks) show promise.	Patty (2024); Tran & Nguyen (2024)
<b>Employability Link</b>	Speaking anxiety lowers students' confidence in meeting workplace communication expectations.	Balakrishnan et al. (2025)

## 5.0 Conclusion

This review has highlighted the the issues and complexity of oral presentation anxiety among Malaysian students, particularly those in TVET and polytechnic institutions. Consistent evidence shows that language proficiency, limited exposure to public speaking, and contextual factors such as the differences between online and face-to-face presentation environments remain main factors of communication apprehension. Although many students rely on personal strategies such as rehearsal and preparation, the review reveals a significant need of structured, institution wide interventions designed to systematically reduce speaking anxiety.

In light of these findings, higher education institutions should consider implementing actionable and targeted measures. These include developing mandatory oral communication modules embedded within English or employability courses; integrating digital presentation tools (e.g., Flipgrid, Canva, Zoom practice rooms) to diversify speaking platforms; and offering TED-style presentation activities, peer-coaching circles, and scaffolded presentation tasks that gradually build students' confidence. Such initiatives not only enhance linguistic competence but also address psychological readiness, helping students develop resilience and self-regulation during speaking tasks.



Furthermore, the implications extend beyond classroom practice. Policymakers and curriculum designers should prioritise oral communication as a core graduate competency, ensuring that assessment rubrics, teaching guidelines, and program standards explicitly emphasise presentation literacy. Strengthening support systems such as communication labs, coaching workshops, and collaboration with industry partners can also better align student communication development with workplace expectations, thereby improving employability outcomes.

Finally, future research should examine oral presentation anxiety through longitudinal studies that track changes over the course of students' academic progression, as well as mixed-method approaches that explore the lived experiences behind anxiety triggers. Investigating employers' perspectives on graduates' communication readiness and evaluating the effectiveness of specific interventions (industry linked presentations) would offer valuable insights for refining curricular decisions. Studies comparing different institutions, regions, or demographic groups could further deepen understanding of contextual influences within the Malaysian higher education landscape.

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## **7.0 Authors Contributions**

The author was solely responsible for the conceptualization, literature search, analysis, and writing of this manuscript. All sections, including the introduction, literature review, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion, were prepared and finalized by the author.

## **8.0 Conflict of Interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest related to the publication of this manuscript.



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