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OVERCOMING PUBLIC SPEAKING PHOBIA: BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT: Public speaking is a significant communication skill that improves academic and professional performance, career progress, leadership development, and social relations. The fact that most people suffer from glossophobia (fear of speaking before an audience) reduces self-confidence and leads to poor communication. This paper reviews and discusses glossophobia, its causes, symptoms and effects, including evidence-based strategies to overcome it. The study identifies factors such as mental preparation, positive thinking, relaxation skills, audience analysis, rehearsing, effective delivery using verbal and non-verbal skills, and continuous practice that build public speakers' self-confidence. This paper uses a descriptive narrative literature review, drawing on relevant literature on glossophobia, speaking anxiety, self-efficacy, and methods for managing public speaking phobia, selected in tandem with the study topic. The literature search and selection were carried out using the online scientific databases PubMed, Google Scholar, Scopus, and PsycINFO, with searches based on speech anxiety, self-efficacy, and related terms, as well as peer-reviewed articles on the study topic. Self-Efficacy Theory, developed by Albert Bandura, provides a theoretical framework and explains how to enhance self-efficacy through mastery experiences and cognitive restructuring. The conclusion summarises key strategies, such as persistent practice, managing emotions, and planned preparation, for developing confident, effective, and efficient public speakers and achieving personal and professional goals.

Keywords: Public Speaking, Glossophobia, Self-Efficacy Theory, Communication Skills, Confidence Building, Audience Analysis, Leadership Development

INTRODUCTION

The core principle behind any public speaking scenario is the capacity to share information with others. This skill enables clear communication, influence over one's audience, effective participation in academic and business settings, and constructive interaction in social spaces.

Public speaking is a crucial tool for personal and leadership growth because it strengthens one's ability to inform, motivate, and move the audience to respond (Cenderato, 2026). In the classroom, it builds confidence and academic ability, and in the workplace, it strengthens communication and decision-making skills. Although speaking publicly is a useful skill, many people suffer from it, known as "glossophobia", because they lack confidence, have had past poor experiences with speaking, are not well prepared or are afraid of criticism from an audience; this fear is often seen in the loss of confidence and decreased self-esteem (Abubakar et al., 2025).

Though the fear of public speaking is common for everyone, it is not unavoidable; it is a trait humans have to live with forever, but it is a thing one can, and will, overcome through deliberate and repeated effort. Studies show that public speaking fear can subside and speaking skills can improve through specific preparation, frequent practice, and analysing the audience (Oziri et al., 2025). Cognitively, techniques such as positive self-talk, mental imagery, and rehearsal can strengthen speakers' mental preparation and reduce negative cognitive patterns related to public speaking fear. Relaxation techniques like breathing control and controlling speech rate can also help speakers cope with physical effects like increased heart rate and tense Muscles. With these techniques, speakers can gradually build stability and confidence.

Kazeem et al. (2025) posited that, by applying techniques of skill development, emotional regulation, and thought modification, people can conquer the phobia of public speaking. By implementing practical steps such as systematic desensitisation, relaxation skills and confidence-increasing methods, the speaker develops confidence and control rather than nervousness and panic. Repeated experience with speaking can also build a sense of resiliency to anxiety-provoking situations, and make it seem more doable, even enjoyable. Once individuals gain confidence, they can connect with their audience and share their ideas clearly, vibrantly, and expertly.

Though there is considerable research related to public speaking anxiety, few studies have provided useful combined practical tools which a non-expert is able to utilise for abating glossophobia. This paper aims to fill that gap and offers several readily available behavioural, relaxation, and cognitive techniques to prevent anticipatory fear among students and low-cadre personnel in the working public. It hopes to equip educators, student leaders, as well as the more immature professionals with useful and accessible techniques, backed by research evidence in the realm of increasing one's level of comfort in public speaking activities. The paper seeks to clarify, through manageable self-management strategies, the role of effective preparation along with regular public speaking practice in diminishing feelings of anxiety as well as building confident leadership, personal development, and effective interpersonal skills.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a narrative literature review approach to identify, critique, and synthesise a comprehensive overview of glossophobia, its aetiology, its impact, and practical strategies and interventions that may effectively address the fear of public speaking. The literature selected was an extensive investigation of academic publications regarding public speaking anxiety, cognitive behavioural methods, the application of relaxation techniques, self-efficacy, confidence and

public speaking skills. The study used literature from 2023 to 2026 to explain the study, supplemented by older foundational and more significant resources that provided vital conceptual information where needed. Each retrieved article was selected for its direct relevance to the field and its ability to comprehensively outline glossophobia and methods of addressing it in academic or professional settings. Because this study used a non-empirical design, no data were collected using a research instrument; the output was derived exclusively from analysis of information from existing texts.

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura's (1977) Self-Efficacy Theory serves as the theoretical model for this paper, as it examines psychological change that requires overcoming Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA), or Glossophobia, to develop competent communication skills. Bandura developed Self-Efficacy Theory from Social Learning Theory, later calling it Social Cognitive Theory after acknowledging that behaviour changes are influenced not only by external consequences but also by internal cognitive self-evaluations (Scott et al., 2024). At its core, the theory posits that perceived self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in their capability to perform the behaviours necessary to achieve specific performance outcomes (Abshar & Rofifah, 2026). For this reason, the theory is highly applicable to this research on glossophobia, as discussed in the literature review; glossophobia is essentially a collapse in self-confidence in which the speaker significantly undersells their ability while concurrently overselling the likelihood of failure. In this framework, a speaker's pessimistic forecasts can be cognitively reprogrammed to help the individual feel empowered and build self-confidence.

Underlying the postulates in Bandura's framework are the four sources of information by which self-efficacy is built and changed, including mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion and physiological cum emotional states (Rumjaun & Narod, 2025). This four-level structure also aligns closely with the intervention tactics introduced in the present study for conquering anxiety about speaking in public. For example, the study's structured rehearsal and repeated opportunities for public speaking are parallel to Bandura's notion of mastery experiences - believed to be the most influential method for building high self-efficacy, since this represents performance experiences which most directly and unequivocally demonstrate a person's capabilities. Similarly, the study's conversation regarding replacing thoughts of inadequacy with a style of "positive self-talk affirmativeness", while paying attention to cues from listeners, is a counterpart to Bandura's social persuasion, where a person is "persuaded by verbal support from other people who convince him or her that he or she has the capabilities to succeed."

Perhaps the theory’s most significant contribution to this paper, however, is that it vividly describes and explains the somatic and emotional feedback loops underlying the experience of glossophobia. According to Bandura, ‘perceiving their own physiological and emotional responses to events can influence self-efficacy expectations, because this information is read by observers as an index of their ability, and hence a guide for predicting performance outcomes’ (Aprisal & Apriliana, 2026). Specifically, the highly activated autonomic nervous system - racing heart, trembling hands, and shallow breaths - is cognitively misread by speakers as indicating an inevitable disastrous outcome, thereby severely shattering their self-belief. This clearly highlights

the importance of the relaxation techniques introduced later, including deep breathing, mindfulness, and progressive muscle relaxation; by actively reducing somatic activation of the nervous system, speakers literally alter the information the brain receives and increase self-belief. Bandura's framework is therefore well suited to this paper, as it provides an empirical basis for how confidence, far from being a stable trait, is a malleable state that can be built through practice, thought, emotion, and behaviour.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review provides a thorough review of the nature, physiology, and etiologies of public speaking anxiety (glossophobia) and also critiques behavioural, cognitive, and pedagogical approaches to promote sustainable communication competence, speaker endurance, and professional leadership development.

Discourse on the Nature and Reason for Public Speaking Phobia

As opposed to merely experiencing anxiety, public speaking anxiety, or glossophobia, describes an interrelationship of apprehension, discomfort and panic that surrounds verbal communication and is dependent upon audience presence (Kazanskaia et al., 2025). Rather than basing public speaking anxiety solely on an individual's speaking skill, the literature suggests its intensity is largely determined by the individual's social appraisal, which appears predominantly centred on audience surveillance, criticism, humiliation, and judgement. The physiological component of public speaking anxiety would additionally manifest, given that the felt evaluation can also lead to a physiological fight-or-flight response with further debilitating effects (Abdullahi, 2025). Within Self-Efficacy Theory, these reciprocal psychological and physiological manifestations highlight the role and imperative of strength-building and self-confidence in managing Public Speaking Anxiety.

The symptoms of public speaking anxiety are also intertwined rather than independent events. The individual experiences physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural reactions; these physical reactions can influence one another. Physical responses include "accelerated heartbeats, sweating, tremors, dry mouth, tight muscles, dizziness and shortness of breath", which represent the activation of the autonomic nervous system once a social situation is perceived as a threat (Sulaiman, 2024). These physical responses contribute to emotions, which include 'fear, panic, embarrassment and helplessness, while negative self-criticism, extreme self-consciousness and worry about error can lead to difficulties with focus and delivery' (Mogboh & Iloanwusi, 2025). Eventually, people avoid speaking opportunities, restrict their verbal output, speak very quickly, avoid eye contact, and consult their notes too much (Johari et al., 2025).

As the source of public speaking anxiety is not singular, it seems to derive from a host of interrelated cognitive, preparatory, and self-perceptual variables. A key driver is concern about negative evaluation, where speakers worry that their audience will judge their knowledge, clarity, and preparedness, pulling their focus from the intended message toward fear of judgment and/or failure (Barrett et al., 2024). This concern can be enhanced further by insufficient preparation, as both a lack of knowledge of the topic and rehearsal experience can increase worry and minimise

the speaker's confidence in being confident in his ability and knowledge related to the talk, and can be fortified by the individual's low self-esteem. Supporting this link, low self-confidence also entails high communication apprehension and performance fear (Xin & Derakhshan, 2025). Psychological influences, along with past experience, seem to both combine and intertwine during public speaking anxiety. Key issues within these influences include perfectionistic beliefs and experiences that are perceived as supporting current failures and future expectations. High levels of perfectionistic beliefs create high anxiety because they set high standards and fuel worry about trivial mistakes, adding stress that can lead to poor speaking performance (Rahmat & Osere, 2025). Experiences of being forgetful, embarrassed, or chastised for a slip or error can have lingering effects that lead a user to anticipate future negative speaking events and avoid the situation altogether (Owoeye, 2025).

The fear of public speaking could just prevent a person from speaking up in class; the anxiety can more broadly restrict a person's growth when it comes to their education, career and personal life. A pattern of avoidance may limit opportunities for communication, leadership, and social learning, thereby limiting individuals (Sharif et al., 2023). Academically, speech anxiety may cause the person to participate less in class, present poorly in class speeches, and be ineffective at group work. Occupations similarly fall prey, as they require the person to contribute during staff meetings, give presentations, supervise people during presentations, or obtain jobs with higher levels of responsibility (Kaplan-Rakowski & Gruber, 2023). These negative tendencies toward speech anxiety may lead to increased insecurity, low social engagement, and increased ineptitude with the ability to persuade others or achieve goals and therefore create an anxiety loop where avoiding making speeches leads to less experience with communication and more inability to become communication experts.

Confidence Building from Mental and Emotional Preparedness

Based on self-efficacy theory, overcoming glossophobia involves changing a speaker's core belief: that public speaking is an evaluative threat of shame, not a process of self-aware learning (Rahman, 2024). This change directly challenges speech anxiety-generating negative self-image predictions, shifting the focus by instilling psychologically valuable properties such as hope for success, self-efficacy-related thinking, and positive, empirical feedback on performance (Otuogha et al., 2024). Therefore, establishing a stable inner cognitive world becomes a powerful tool that reduces speaking anxiety and increases confidence.

Far from being an unalterable construct, communication self-confidence is a malleable competence cultivated through reinforcing real experiences and deliberately modifying self-cognitive schemas. Rather than functioning solely as an end state, confidence is a transactional process involving the congruence between speaker efficacy and audience reception; speakers high in confidence project more clearly and show higher listener engagement, directly contributing to favourable evaluations (Kim et al., 2026). The use of cognitive therapy-positive self-talk and affirmations-interrupts maladaptive belief-system patterns, thus altering a speaker's poor perception of self. In so doing, repetitive practice, feedback exchanges, and speech affirmations collectively increase speakers' competence in delivering speeches, reduce a listener's perceived evaluation threat, and inherently reduce speaking apprehension.

By practicing adequate relaxation and psychological preparation, you can build confidence by reducing the physical arousal and anticipations of negative possibilities inherent to public speaking. Deep or diaphragmatic breathing, Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) & meditation can help alleviate anxiety symptoms caused by breathing issues and a rapid heartbeat, while also diverting thoughts away from expectations that you will make errors or be perceived negatively by an audience (Rahman & Marzal, 2024). Therefore, these methods address both physical and cognitive symptoms of speaking anxiety. Like these relaxation methods, visualisation and mental rehearsal allow individuals to visualise successful delivery and anticipate negative events, plan how to counter difficulties, and reduce pre-presentation anxiety, leading to better delivery (Baschab et al., 2026). Cumulatively, these methods suggest that calming emotional/physical responses builds confidence and presentation skills.

Developing long-term confidence in public speaking requires confidence, resilience, and emotional competency not only to manage fear in the moment, but also to respond to criticism and adversity. To reduce these exaggerated concerns about judgement from the audience, and the belief that the speaker was constantly thinking about their negative aspects, speakers might re-conceptualise their listeners as "interested recipients"; by considering and changing listeners' expectations in this way, they would also adjust their own anticipations (Panda et al., 2024). Repeated public speaking also helps individuals learn from mistakes, prepare for unforeseen events or circumstances, and stay emotionally balanced throughout any presentation. Regular reflection on these learning experiences and events may also build emotional competence and robustness by turning difficult events into learning opportunities. In summary, increased control over our emotions and strengthened resilience may contribute to how effectively a speaker can interact persuasively and confidently in a lecture, academic presentation, or speech (Martiningsih et al., 2024).

Strategies for a Successful Public Speaking Presentation

Rather than merely an administrative requirement, careful preparation and research give speakers the cognitive tools to turn a potentially threat-eliciting evaluation into a credible presentation delivery. It gives speakers mastery in their chosen topic, enabling them to anticipate listener questions and reduce performance anxiety in the moment while maintaining focus throughout the presentation (Jean-Pierre et al., 2023). Grounding data sources in reliable information enhances speakers' epistemic authority, ensuring listeners stay attentive and trust the speaker's expertise, which in turn reinforces the speaker's own sense of expertise on the subject. Organised around clear, results-oriented presentation goals, systematic investigation ensures information becomes communication and leaves speakers unburdened by the mental processing overload of the unknown.

Beyond organisation, reasoned logical structure and planned audience analysis serve as strategic cognitive tools that minimise communication friction while making the audience receptive to the speech message. Preparing a speech with an introduction-main body-conclusion sequence provides a predictable guide by generating initial interest, organising evidence logically, and summarising the message at the end (Ali & Ali, 2026). When combined with demographic and

situational audience analyses, this logical structure helps select vocabulary, choose examples, and decide how to deliver a speech in line with the audience (Aqeel & Chung, 2024).

Deliberate rehearsal is not simply a mechanical process, but one that translates structural preparation into expressive skill and effective communication. This process-through repetition-allows individuals to master the material to their liking, discover weak points in delivery, and manage timing, so as to reduce uncertainty in a presentation (García-Monge et al., 2023). Moreover, rehearsal effectively reconnects preparedness and enactment by making fundamental speech elements-voice (e.g., loudness, clarity, pitch, tone, pace)-effective and easy for listeners to access and remember. This, in turn, helps eliminate disinterest and doubt. Therefore, through deliberate rehearsal, speakers manage not only what to communicate but also how it sounds. Such practice transforms preparation and performance by diminishing-and at once reinforcing the speaker (Speer et al., 2025)

Non-verbal and visual aspects, as physical aids, do not merely accompany the content delivered in a talk; they also serve as instruments for projecting believability and maintaining the speaker's credibility and effectiveness. Long, sustained eye contact enhances mutual understanding and increases the speaker's trustworthiness and credibility, which extends intimacy with participants (Yu et al., 2024). Meanwhile, the deliberate control over body position and gesture animates the speaker and message, emphasises the more important points, and sustains the attention of the audience (Shankaran et al., 2026). With intelligent deployment, combining posture, gesture, and presentation technology further helps maximise transmission efficiency and minimise listeners' cognitive burden (Simamora et al., 2024). Aligning body posture, gestures, and technology helps speakers feel prepared and at ease when handling abrupt interruptions from unexpected circumstances.

Making Impact and Long-Term Success in Public Speaking

More than an effective mode of vocal transmission, the transformative impact of public communication comes from creating a deep cognitive and emotional connection with the audience (Dzaiy & Abdullah, 2024). With social evaluation, as well as internal strength conceptualised as self-efficacy, the perceived integrity and logical cohesiveness of the communication neutralise listener scepticism and cultivate connections between the communicator and listener. As communicative competence, including internal confidence level, improves, the communicator develops stronger skills in delivering messages dynamically adjusted to numerous social contexts with optimal contextual fit (Benning et al., 2025). Speakers may take on the role, utilise their repertoire of narratives, interactions, and persuasive discourse beyond merely disseminating information; in effect, making public speaking a tool for societal leadership, influence, debate, and projection of authority.

In the long term, the objective of engaging in public speaking will be accomplished through knowledge acquisition, personal reflection, and enhanced professionalism. Public speaking professionals seek regular feedback, reflect on their performances, and identify areas to improve to hone their oratory skills (Adaeze & Asuzu, 2025). Consistent participation in speaking assignments helps them build confidence, adapt, and become more resilient when facing different

audiences and awkward situations. Additionally, viewing mistakes as opportunities to learn, not as failures, will increase motivation to keep learning. Thus, as the capability to do public speaking takes time to develop, people gain more confidence in themselves, achieve greater visibility in their fields and open more doors to career opportunities and leadership roles. In conclusion, continuous practice and ongoing learning can make public speaking less frightening and can greatly support personal growth, professional success, and contributions to society (Pandey & Khatri, 2026).

DISCUSSION

It was revealed through this narrative literature review that several underlying psychological, physiological and behavioural attributes, namely 'fear of negative evaluation', 'lack of self-confidence', 'lack of adequate preparation', 'perfectionist attitude' and 'bad previous experience of speaking', are contributory elements towards 'Glossophobia'. Again, it was observed through the literature review that practising systematic methods, such as positive self-talk, relaxation, visualisation, systematic preparation and rehearsal, knowledge of the audience, and the use of non-verbal and verbal means of delivery, can lead to an optimum level of reduction in anxiety and an increase in the degree of confidence in public speaking. These results correlate well with Bandura's Self-Efficacy theory, which explains how self-efficacy or confidence can be learned rather than just a personality trait. His four origins of self-efficacy, which include mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion and physiological and emotional states, are not in direct consonance with many of the strategies reviewed here. Furthermore, when providing confidence-building sessions, positive feedback could create social persuasion, and relaxation for fear or negative mood would manage the physiological/emotional state.

Conclusion

Public speaking anxiety remains a substantial barrier to effective communication and to personal, academic and career development, despite numerous studies showing reductions in the problem through appropriate interventions (Darmuki & Hidayati, 2026). The literature indicates that confidence will flourish through psychological readiness, emotional regulation of anxiety, sufficient preparation, practice, the development of positive self-beliefs, and appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication skills. However, the review is limited by its qualitative approach and search scope, and it may not be able to justify which intervention is more effective for all individuals. Hence, further study is required, using an experimental, longitudinal design to compare various interventions that most reduce public speaking anxiety and increase self-efficacy in communication skills. Applications would be in education and the workplace by introducing well-constructed programmes, such as organised speech courses, regular repetition and preparation, as well as a feedback component.

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