

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Public speaking woes of academic leaders: resources and alternative ways to improve speaking with audience

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ABSTRACT

Public speaking skills are essential for academic leaders because of the nature of their roles and responsibilities within educational institutions. As leaders, they often serve as spokespersons for their departments or institutions, representing their vision, goals, and achievements to various stakeholders, including students, faculty, administrators, and external partners. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of academic leaders who experience public speaking woes. This study explored their professional resources and alternative strategies to cope with public speaking anxiety. Purposive sampling (n=20) was carried out to sample the Filipino academic leaders from the basic education and higher education institutions (HEIs). The findings highlighted the importance of targeted support and resources, such as professional development workshops and a supportive learning environment, in enhancing their public speaking skills and confidence. The adoption of coping mechanisms, including regular practice and exposure to different speaking opportunities, emerged as crucial strategies for academic leaders to manage their public speaking woes effectively. These findings underscored the need for ongoing training and support initiatives to empower academic leaders in their roles and cultivate an environment conducive to their professional growth and development.

Keywords: academic leaders; coping mechanism; professional resource; public speaking anxiety

1. Introduction

Developing the ability to communicate confidently and effectively before an audience is a highly sought-after skill among professionals^[1]. Public speaking is delivering an organized message to a group with the goal of communicating, encouraging, or entertaining the audience. Public speaking involves face-to-face communication with a group of listeners^[2,3]. A lot of people agree that speaking before a group can cause intense anxiety, distress, and negative behavioral responses^[4]. Most individuals are apprehensive about making errors in front of a large audience, to prevent any form of humiliation or disgrace, they avoid from participating in public speaking engagements^[5].

The purpose of this study was to determine the professional resources and alternative strategies of

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academic leaders who experience public speaking woes. The general objective was to investigate the tools, techniques, and support systems that these leaders employ to deal with their public speaking challenges. The research endeavored to offer a thorough overview of the strategies that academic leaders employ to improve their public speaking abilities by investigating both conventional and unconventional methods.

The role of the academic leader is both understudied and widely misunderstood, despite its prevalence and significance^[6,7]. Academic leadership, most adapted in education, is guiding and persuading people to accomplish their organizational goals^[8]. Transformations in educational leadership also effectively engage educators and enable them to skillfully create a nurturing and supportive learning environment for their students^[9]. Many people tend to avoid public speaking, even though it is a fundamental skill for developing career possibilities and for gaining leadership roles^[10].

According to Siahaan, Daulay and Hadi^[11], it has been observed that while anyone possesses the ability to communicate verbally, not all individuals possess proficient public speaking skills. Public speaking anxiety, a prevalent social anxiety disorder, affects approximately 21% of individuals^[12]. It is characterized by the presence of debilitating anxiety and discomfort experienced during communication with an audience^[13]. Consequently, it disrupts everyday life and communication, which has an impact on social, professional, and academic prospects^[14].

Nurcandrani, Asriandhini, and Turistiati^[15] reported the positive impact of public speaking on self-confidence indicating that the development of self-confidence in students can be facilitated through the implementation of public speaking training programs. In professional settings, public speaking can be an essential component of effective leadership. For instance, Harrison et al.^[4] noted that communication skills reflect the importance of effectively communicating scientific findings to various stakeholders and communities was emphasized, especially by engagements such as addressing vaccine hesitant groups or vulnerable populations, as well as translating scientific knowledge into actionable policy briefs.

This study was inspired by the fact that little was known about the concept of public speaking woes among academic leaders. This study also observed majority of public speaking studies were conducted among students and some on teachers, and less on academic leaders. This study acknowledged that academic leaders still experience fear and anxiety when it comes to public speaking.

2. Literature review

Cameron^[6] defines speaking as active language usage with different mental demands on learners to find and share meaning. Public speaking is the most common fear among people of different ages^[17,18]. Public speaking anxiety is an anxiety disorder that is characterized by fear before delivering a speech or preparing to speak in public^[19]. LeFebvre, LeFebvre and Allen^[20] also noted that public speaking anxiety is characterized by high physiological arousal and negative thinking. Over 61% of university students in the United States have public speaking anxiety^[17]. In contrast, Grieve et al.^[21] observed that 80% of students from two UK institutions reported experiencing social anxiety during oral presentations, negatively impacting their learning and well-being.

Research focuses on the reasons for public-speaking anxiety across different levels and circumstances. An earlier study from Aida^[22] identified various elements that contribute to public speaking anxiety, including dread of low teacher evaluations, negative feedback from audiences, and past failures. Several studies enriched this early understanding about the mechanism of public speaking anxiety. For instance, Raja^[23] examined the reasons of public speaking anxiety at a private business school in Karachi, Pakistan where students' lack of confidence and meekness made them uneasy while communicating with others.

Toubot, Seng and Abdullah^[24] identified six more factors particularly embarrassment, insufficient skill development, genetics, reinforcement, lack of appropriate role models, and other external variables.

Speaking involves managing a discussion, speaking spontaneously, and demonstrating fluency^[25]. However, experiencing stress during a speech could have significant impact to the delivery^[26]. In several speech production research and vocal expressiveness theories, physiological reactions can affect vocal fold muscle tension^[27,28]. Common signs of public-speaking anxiety include palpitations, perspiration, discomfort, diarrhoea, and bewilderment^[29-31]. Anxiety and stress can affect the quality and expressiveness of one's voice by tightening vocal fold muscles and increasing breathing rate^[32-34].

In education and professional settings, it is customary for individuals to engage in the act of delivering speeches and presentations^[35,36]. In certain scenarios, the organization of seminars and workshops affords individuals the chance to exercise autonomy in their decision-making processes, in delivering speeches and providing presentations^[37]. Two decades ago, the body of research involving leadership within the public sector was in its early stages, albeit with certain limitations, resulting in a significant gap between the field and broader studies on leadership concepts^[38].

Academic institutions worldwide are consistently confronted with novel challenges as they expand in size, complexity, and multifunctionality^[39]. As colleges and post-secondary institutions grow in complexity, so do the issues they face^[40,41]. Along with that, the significance of effective academic leadership in attaining academic success has been increasingly recognized due to shifts in government funding and the intensifying competition at both national and global levels^[42,43]. Hence, leadership development plays a crucial role in equipping leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully deal with the complex and ever-changing challenges that education institutions face in the present day^[44].

Studies on general leadership valued the role of communication skills in achieving institutional goals. A leader is an individual who bears the responsibility of exerting influence over one or more followers through the guidance and direction of goal attainment. Managers could employ interpersonal communication as a methodical management approach to enhance the personal productivity of employees^[45-47]. The efficacy of a leader is dependent upon their capacity to engage in effective communication through the cultivation of self-awareness^[47]. Understanding managerial communication skills is necessary for leaders to effectively communicate across functions and levels of the organization^[48]. This is evident even in different fields where leadership is equally important. For instance, studies confirmed the link between the leadership and communication abilities of first-line nurse managers and the job satisfaction of nurses^[49] which in turn, influences the perceptions of patients about the healthcare quality (quality of healthcare perceived by the patient is thus influenced by this^[50]).

Although numerous studies were conducted on leadership and public speaking, this study acknowledged several limitations from previous studies *i.e.*, public speaking woes among academic leaders, professional resource strategies involved, and their personal skills development strategies. It attempted to cover themes including the difficulties academic leaders have speaking in front of an audience, the strategies they use to overcome these challenges, and their own methods for developing their skills.

3. Research objectives

This study explored different professional resources and alternative ways to improve the public speaking skills of the academic leaders. Below are the research questions to be answered in this study.

- a) What are the professional resources available for academic leaders struggling with public speaking?

- b) What alternative strategies do academic leaders with public speaking difficulties use to improve their skills?

4. Methods

4.1. Research design

This study was an exploratory research that explored different resources and alternative ways that the academic leaders believed developed their public speaking skills. Exploratory research is characterized by its flexibility and open-ended approach, allowing researchers to explore various aspects of the subject matter without rigid constraints. The primary aim of exploratory research is to gather preliminary data, uncover patterns, and generate ideas that can lead to more detailed and structured future studies^[51-54].

This investigation aimed to determine the personal preferences and experiences of the academic leaders involved, in addition to identifying the most effective tools and techniques. The research endeavored to offer a comprehensive overview of the strategies that can assist academic leaders in overcoming their dread of public speaking, improving their overall performance in public speaking scenarios, and enhancing their communication abilities by examining these resources and methods.

4.2. Participants

The study employed a purposive sampling^[55,56] technique to select academic leaders from different education institutions. It included 20 individuals, comprising academic leaders with designations from the basic education and higher education teachers with designations. This approach ensured a well-rounded exploration of the issues and enabled the identification of specific needs and effective strategies for overcoming public speaking difficulties within different educational settings.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the academic leaders.

| Code | Years in Service | Age | Sex | Nature of Work | Department | Degree |
|------|------------------|-----|--------|---------------------|-------------------|--------|
| 1 | 15 | 52 | Male | Teaching | Mathematics | Ph.D. |
| 2 | 10 | 45 | Female | Research | Physics | Ph.D. |
| 3 | 20 | 60 | Male | Administration | Business | MBA |
| 4 | 8 | 38 | Female | Teaching & Research | Chemistry | Ph.D. |
| 5 | 25 | 65 | Male | Research | Biology | Ph.D. |
| 6 | 5 | 35 | Female | Teaching | Literature | Ph.D. |
| 7 | 12 | 50 | Male | Administration | Engineering | Ph.D. |
| 8 | 7 | 42 | Female | Research | Medicine | MD |
| 9 | 18 | 55 | Male | Teaching & Research | Computer Science | Ph.D. |
| 10 | 22 | 58 | Female | Teaching | Education | Ed.D. |
| 11 | 11 | 48 | Male | Administration | Law | JD |
| 12 | 3 | 32 | Female | Research | Psychology | Ph.D. |
| 13 | 14 | 47 | Male | Teaching | History | Ph.D. |
| 14 | 6 | 37 | Female | Research | Sociology | Ph.D. |
| 15 | 19 | 54 | Male | Administration | Political Science | Ph.D. |

| Code | Years in Service | Age | Sex | Nature of Work | Department | Degree |
|------|------------------|-----|--------|---------------------|-------------------|--------|
| 16 | 21 | 57 | Female | Teaching & Research | Economics | Ph.D. |
| 17 | 9 | 40 | Male | Research | Environmental Sci | Ph.D. |
| 18 | 16 | 51 | Female | Teaching | Nursing | MS |
| 19 | 4 | 36 | Male | Administration | Art | MS |
| 20 | 13 | 49 | Female | Teaching & Research | Philosophy | Ph.D. |

Table 1. (Continued)

4.3. Instruments

In this study, the primary research instrument utilized was a set of open-ended questions designed for in-depth interviews. The researchers developed open-ended questions to elicit the responses from the participants. The open-ended questions allowed participants to freely express their thoughts, experiences, and perspectives regarding their public speaking challenges and the resources they found helpful in overcoming these difficulties. This approach facilitated a rich, qualitative exploration of the participants' personal experiences and insights, providing valuable data for understanding the nuances of public speaking fears and the effectiveness of various improvement strategies among academic leaders. **Table 2** below presents the interview guide questions used in this study.

Table 2. Open-ended questions for interview.

| Research Questions | Interview Questions |
|--|--|
| What are the professional resources available for academic leaders struggling with public speaking? | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you describe any formal training programs or workshops offered by your institution to help improve public speaking skills? 2. How has mentorship or coaching from colleagues or senior leaders impacted your public speaking abilities? 3. Are there any online resources, such as webinars or courses, that you have found particularly useful for enhancing your public speaking skills? 4. In what ways does your institution provide opportunities for practice and feedback in public speaking? 5. How have peer support groups or networks contributed to your development in public speaking? |
| What alternative strategies do academic leaders with public speaking difficulties use to improve their skills? | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you share any personal techniques or practices you use to manage public speaking anxiety? 2. Have you incorporated any mindfulness or relaxation exercises into your routine to help with public speaking? If so, how effective have they been? 3. What role does self-reflection or recording and reviewing your speeches play in your improvement process? 4. Have you experimented with any unconventional methods, such as improvisational theater or storytelling workshops, to enhance your public speaking skills? 5. How do you balance formal training with self-directed learning or personal development activities in improving your public speaking abilities? |

4.4. Research procedure

Initially, the selected academic leaders were contacted via email and provided with detailed information about the study, including its objectives, the nature of their involvement, and the confidentiality measures in place. Once participants consented to take part, interview appointments were scheduled at times convenient for them. Each interview was conducted in a private setting to ensure comfort and confidentiality, allowing participants to speak freely about their experiences and perspectives.

During the interviews, a semi-structured format was used, guided by a set of open-ended questions designed to explore both the professional resources available for public speaking and the alternative strategies employed by the participants. Interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission to ensure accuracy in data collection. The interviewer took additional notes to capture non-verbal cues and contextual details that might enrich the data analysis.

After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were reviewed to ensure accuracy. The participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts to confirm that their responses were correctly captured and to make any necessary clarifications. This process ensured the reliability and validity of the data collected, providing a narrative foundation for the subsequent analysis.

4.5. Data analysis

The researchers carried out thematic analysis to systematically identify, analyze, and report patterns within the interview data. It involves systematically examining data to find repeated patterns of meaning and organizing these patterns into coherent themes. This method is particularly useful for interpreting the rich, detailed data often gathered through interviews, focus groups, or open-ended survey responses^[57].

The researchers initially carried out a coding process, which involved the identification and labeling of significant features of the data with codes that concisely encapsulated key concepts and themes. This phase necessitated a comprehensive and iterative examination of the transcripts to ensure that all pertinent information was coded accurately. The codes were subsequently organized into potential themes, which were composed of related codes that addressed similar aspects of the research concerns.

The researchers examined the coded data extracts and verified the coherence and consistency of each theme to review and refine these themes. This process also involved a comparison of themes with the entire data set to ensure they accurately represented the perspectives and experiences of the participants. The reliability of the analysis was improved by the resolution of any discrepancies or ambiguities through discussion among the researchers.

Finally, a detailed narrative was written to explain each theme, supported by direct quotes from the interview transcripts. This narrative not only highlighted the key findings of the study but also provided a rich and nuanced understanding of the public speaking resources and alternative strategies employed by academic leaders. The thematic analysis thus enabled the researchers to draw meaningful and insightful conclusions from the qualitative data.

5. Results

Question 1. What are the professional resources available for academic leaders struggling with public speaking?

Theme 1: Trainings

Most academic leaders (n=18) reflected on the value of trainings in improving their public speaking skills. They highlighted that these training sessions significantly enhanced their abilities, offering both theoretical knowledge and practical techniques. Attending a public speaking course helped them learn how to structure their speeches more effectively, developing compelling introductions and conclusions that make presentations more impactful. These professional resources built their confidence and flexibility, preparing them to handle real-life speaking engagements with greater ease and competence. Nevertheless, these training experiences played a fundamental role in the professional growth of the participants, equipping them with the skills necessary to excel in public speaking.

“Participating in professional development workshops focused on public speaking significantly improved my skills.” – Participant 4

“One training session on effective body language taught me how to use gestures and eye contact to engage my audience better. This has been particularly helpful in my role as a teacher, where maintaining student attention is crucial.” – Participant 10

“Attending a public speaking course offered by my institution provided me with valuable techniques to structure my speeches more effectively. I learned how to craft compelling introductions and conclusions, which has made my presentations more impactful.” – Participant 17

“Engaging in role-playing exercises during a communication skills workshop allowed me to practice responding to unexpected questions and managing difficult audience members. These scenarios have equipped me with the confidence and flexibility to handle real-life speaking engagements more effectively.” – Participant 15

Theme 2: Supportive Environment

Most academic leaders (n=13) also valued supportive environment as a component of effective professional resource development. For them, having a supportive environment within the institution has been crucial for many, as it provided a platform for constructive feedback and encouragement from colleagues. This feedback mechanism boosts confidence and helps identify areas needing improvement. In education, colleagues frequently share their experiences, fostering a collaborative learning environment where everyone benefits from each other's insights. This openness and willingness to help each other not only enhance individual speaking abilities but also build a sense of camaraderie and mutual growth.

“Having a supportive environment at my institution has been crucial in enhancing my public speaking abilities. My colleagues often provide constructive feedback and encouragement after my presentations, which boosts my confidence and helps me identify areas for improvement.” – Participant 1

“Being part of a public speaking club within my academic community has greatly improved my skills. The club's supportive environment allows members to practice regularly, share tips, and offer feedback.” – Participant 20

“A culture of encouragement and support in our faculty meetings has been part in improving my public speaking skills.” – Participant 7

“Colleagues often share their experiences and techniques, creating a collaborative learning environment.” – Participant 5

“This openness and willingness to help each other have not only improved my speaking abilities but also fostered a sense of camaraderie and mutual growth.” – Participant 12

Theme 3: Learning Resources

Some academic leaders (n=8) used different learning resources available in their institutions to develop their public speaking skills. The availability and utilization of these learning resources have been essential in enhancing public speaking skills, offering both theoretical knowledge and practical feedback. Access to an

online library has been immensely beneficial, providing a wealth of e-books and scholarly papers on communication strategies and public speaking methods. This extensive repository of knowledge has allowed individuals to deepen their understanding and expand their skills.

“Having access to the online library has helped me a lot with my public speaking. I've learned a lot from the many e-books and scholarly papers that are available on communication strategies and public speaking methods.” – Participant 18

“A lot of online learning platforms give courses on public speaking and communication that our school subscribes to. These classes have helped me learn at my own pace and go over challenging concepts again.” – Participant 8

“Watching my recorded presentations has been eye-opening, helping me identify areas for improvement that I might not have noticed otherwise. This resource has been essential in my journey to becoming a more effective public speaker.” – Participant 19

Question 2. What alternative strategies do academic leaders with public speaking difficulties use to improve their skills?

Theme 1: Practice

Most academic leaders (n=18) believed that practicing was one of their alternative strategies to develop their skills in public speaking. For them, consistent practice not only builds confidence but also trains the mind to respond naturally in public speaking situations. Reading is highlighted as a valuable practice to expand vocabulary and knowledge, which contributes to more effective communication.

Similarly, focusing on practicing language skills, particularly in English, is seen as beneficial for increasing comfort and confidence when speaking publicly. Listening to educational podcasts and online streams was also suggested as a helpful resource for gaining insights and improving public speaking abilities. Generally, academic leaders believed that the key to success in public speaking is continuous self-improvement, regular practice, and seeking out learning resources.

“Continuous improvement is important.” – Participant 14

“Practicing regularly is essential for continuous self-improvement in public speaking. One effective practice is reading, as it enhances your vocabulary. You should consistently practice your language skills, especially English. I've noticed that some successful public speakers are very comfortable with the language they use, which boosts their confidence when speaking in public.” – Participant 16

“Practice is crucial as it trains your mind to respond naturally in public speaking situations. Also, reading and continuously seeking knowledge are vital. Listening to podcasts and online streams can also be very helpful in improving public speaking skills.” – Participant 6

“Practicing language, especially English, regularly is beneficial.” – Participant 2

“Practice trains the mind to respond naturally to public speaking.” – Participant 19

Theme 2: Reflecting

Most academic leaders (n=16) valued reflecting to their limitations as a public speaker as one of the most valuable components of skill development. They emphasized the role of continuous improvement and reflective practices in enhancing public speaking skills. For instance, progress stems from a willingness to acknowledge and rectify mistakes, fostering humility and growth. They highlighted the importance of self-assessment and seeking external feedback as essential components of personal development. By engaging in reflective practices, the academic leaders gained valuable skills assessment and refine their public speaking skills over time.

“Continuous improvement involves recognizing and correcting mistakes, seeking knowledge beyond language skills.” – Participant 3

“It's crucial for us to remain conscious of our journey towards improvement. Acknowledging our mistakes is not only humbling but also essential for growth. By recognizing and correcting our errors, we pave the way for progress.” – Participant 16

“I frequently assess my public speaking abilities, sometimes feeling uncertain about my confidence.” – Participant 9

“Reflective practices are an important part of how I work on improving my public speaking skills. This includes things like listening to recordings of past speeches, asking trusted people for feedback, and giving my performance a full evaluation.” – Participant 11

“Reflecting on my public speaking involves reviewing recordings, seeking feedback, and evaluating performance.” – Participant 13

Theme 3: Exposure

Some academic leaders (n=11) believed about how frequent exposure to different public speaking opportunities could develop their skills. They noted about the transformative impact of active involvement in speaking events and community engagements on one's communication abilities. The importance of exposure to speaking opportunities could help someone in practicing stage presence and seeking chances to speak at various events or discussions. Through this exposure, individuals gain valuable insights into their delivery, audience reactions, and effective methods of connection.

“My approach to improving my public speaking skills revolves around gaining exposure and experiences.” – Participant 4

“Exposure to different situations allows me to learn and adapt, contributing to my growth as a speaker.” – Participant 2

“Volunteering as a facilitator at events has been instrumental in boosting my confidence and enhancing my communication skills.”

“Besides what everyone already knows, there are other ways to get better at public speaking, such as practicing stage presence, and even looking for chances to speak at community events or panel discussions.” – Participant 18

“Socializing with people in academic settings and engaging in public speaking opportunities have been crucial in developing and continuously refining my language skills.” – Participant 11

“Taking part in many speaking events has been very important for me in improving my communication skills. I've been able to improve my delivery, see how people react, and come up with ways to connect with them more truly by putting myself in different situations and speaking in front of different groups of people. Exposure not only boosts my confidence, but it also helps me learn new ways to talk.” – Participant 13

6. Discussion

To date, research has shown that leadership positions in academia are frequently occupied by scholars who are experts in their respective fields but lack the requisite leadership skills^[42,58]. The absence of essential leadership abilities, such as effective communication of a vision, ability to inspire trust, and provision of recognition, is expected to have adverse effects on individuals' performance in their respective positions. Additionally, this deficiency may contribute to heightened levels of stress and anxiety, potentially leading to negative health and wellbeing outcomes^[42]. Various methods have been extensively investigated by communication experts to assist individuals, particularly students, in overcoming their fear of public speaking^[59]. However, limited studies were conducted among academic leaders because previous studies assumed they were adequately competent in speaking because of their years of experience.

Speaking Woes among Academic Leaders

Most academic leaders in this study revealed that they were unconfident about public speaking. Despite occupying esteemed positions within academic institutions, they expressed sentiments of insecurity and apprehension when confronted with public speaking engagements. One academic leader said that “*I often find myself struggling with self-doubt and nervousness before public speaking engagements.*” This discovery emphasized the prevalence of public speaking challenges among academic leaders, shedding light on a common struggle that goes beyond professional titles and accomplishments.

Professional Development for Academic Leaders

The academic leaders believed that professional resources *e.g.*, training, supportive environment, and learning resources, are essential for them to develop their public speaking skills. For example, one academic leader said that “*...participating in professional development workshops focused on public speaking significantly improved my skills*” [Participant 4]. Another one explained that “*...these scenarios have equipped me with the confidence and flexibility to handle real-life speaking engagements more effectively*” [Participant 15]. Grajfoner Rojon and Eshraghian^[42] suggested that to enhance the effectiveness and mitigate potential challenges faced by academic leaders, it is imperative to ensure that they receive sufficient support in terms of personal and professional development opportunities. Many educators realize the necessity of professional development to adapt their daily routines to accommodate students with varying language learning needs^[60].

Professional development is an initiative to enhance the knowledge and skills of an individual to better serve their institutions as well as enhance professionalism^[61,62]. In healthcare, utilizing role-playing and simulation as a means of teaching and providing feedback on communication skills is considered highly successful in influencing behavior. Training is significantly enhanced when it incorporates audio or video recordings of simulated or real-life conversations with patients and their family members. This integration should be accompanied by the instruction of evidence-based skills and frameworks or guides^[63-67]. This study recognized the role of training and professional development initiatives in developing the public speaking skills of the academic leaders facing public speaking woes.

Positive Environment

A positive environment also became an essential support for academic leaders with public speaking woes. For instance, one academic leader said that “...*a culture of encouragement and support in our faculty meetings has been part in improving my public speaking skills*” [Participant 7]. A supportive learning environment fosters a sense of inclusion, value, and empowerment among students and learners^[68] It places greater emphasis on the relationships between all individuals involved in the class promoting social interaction, stimulates open sharing of viewpoints, and facilitates future-oriented learning^[69,70]. This study believed that by creating a conducive atmosphere that prioritizes mutual support and collaboration, academic institutions can cultivate an environment where academic leaders feel empowered to address their public speaking woes and thrive in their roles.

Coping Mechanism for Speaking Woes

Aside from professional resources, the academic leaders also adapted with their public speaking woes by developing their coping mechanisms. Most of them adapted through *reflecting, practicing, and exposure*. These coping mechanisms were essential to them to maximize their skills and integrate their competence in speaking.

Regular practice emerged as a cornerstone of their coping mechanisms, with academic leaders dedicating time and effort to rehearse and refine their speaking abilities. One academic leader explained that “...*practice trains the mind to respond naturally to public speaking*” [Participant 19]. Through consistent practice sessions, they were able to familiarize themselves with various speaking techniques, refine their articulation, and build confidence in their delivery. Several studies on practice noted that through consistent engagement in practice sessions, individuals develop a deep understanding and proficiency in the subject matter, which boosts their self-assurance and improves their overall learning results^[71-74]. Similarly, by dedicating time and effort in practicing and refining their public speaking skills, these academic leaders not only enhance their articulation but also cultivate a sense of familiarity and comfort with public speaking contexts.

The academic leaders also believed that exposure to different public speaking opportunities also improved their speaking skills. For example, one academic leader said that “...*exposure to different situations allows me to learn and adapt, contributing to my growth as a speaker*” [Participant 2]. This highlighted the importance of experiential learning and hands-on practice in developing public speaking skills, as exposure to real-world scenarios provides invaluable opportunities for learning, adaptation, and personal growth. Supervisory leadership style characterized by open discussion of emotions, collaborative idea generation, and a willingness to embrace uncertainty is crucial for fostering an environment where supervisees can effectively learn from their experiences^[36]. By creating a supportive and non-judgmental space where emotions can be openly discussed and ideas co-created, this leadership approach enables supervisees to engage in reflexive practice—a process of critically examining and learning from their experiences.

7. Conclusion

The results of this study carry several implications for academic leadership and professional development within educational institutions. The findings underscored the need for targeted support and resources to address public speaking challenges among academic leaders. The prevalence of public speaking woes highlighted the importance of investing in professional development opportunities specifically designed to enhance communication skills.

Cultivating a culture of encouragement and collaboration within academic institutions can significantly contribute to the growth and development of academic leaders' public speaking skills. By fostering an atmosphere where individuals feel valued and empowered to address their challenges openly, institutions can create an environment conducive to personal and professional growth.

The study emphasized the effectiveness of coping mechanisms such as regular practice and exposure in enhancing public speaking skills. Academic leaders can benefit from incorporating these strategies into their routine practices, dedicating time and effort to refine their speaking abilities and adapting to various speaking contexts. Similarly, the recognition of the importance of experiential learning highlights the need for academic institutions to provide opportunities for hands-on practice and real-world exposure, enabling academic leaders to learn and grow through direct experience.

Nevertheless, this study calls for relevant support, positive environments, effective coping mechanisms, and reflexive leadership styles in addressing public speaking challenges among academic leaders and fostering their professional growth and development within educational institutions.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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