



Addressing the Impacts of Glossophobia in Northern Nigerian Universities: A Multi-Dimensional Approach

Dr. Nasir Umar Abdullahi^{1*}, Dr. Abdulhakim Saidu¹, Prof. Mohammed Sada Bature¹

¹Department of English and French, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina-State, Nigeria

*Corresponding author: Dr. Nasir Umar Abdullahi

Department of English and French, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina-State, Nigeria

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Abstract:

Public speaking anxiety, commonly referred to as glossophobia, is one of the most prevalent forms of communication apprehension among university students and has significant implications for academic participation and professional development. This study investigates the prevalence and determinants of glossophobia among undergraduate students in selected universities in Northern Nigeria. Using a structured questionnaire, data were collected from 300 respondents across different academic levels. The dataset was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis involved reliability testing, descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and A One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.804, indicating good internal consistency of the instrument. The findings reveal a high prevalence of public speaking anxiety, with approximately 59% of the respondents, reporting nervousness when speaking in public contexts. Descriptive statistics further indicate that lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes during oral communication constitute the most prominent triggers of glossophobia among the respondents. Inferential statistical analysis shows no significant differences in glossophobia across gender or academic levels, suggesting that public speaking anxiety is a widespread phenomenon affecting students across demographic groups. The findings highlight the need for targeted pedagogical interventions, including structured public speaking training, classroom participation strategies, and communication skills workshops, to reduce communication apprehension among university students. The study contributes to the growing body of research on communication anxiety in higher education, particularly within the context of developing educational environments.

Keywords: Glossophobia, Public Speaking Anxiety, Communication Apprehension, University Students, SPSS Analysis, Higher Education, Classroom Participation, Northern Nigeria.

Review Article

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, people have used public speaking as a vital means of communication

Lucas, E. *The Art of Public Speaking*, 8th Edition (2004:4).

Indeed and to corroborate Lucas' value-judgment quoted above, we ought to decipher that this communicative medium via the power of confidence, eloquence, the use of appropriate dictions and style of presentation is replete with innumerable challenges one of which is glossophobia. Glossophobia or the fear to speak

in the public is not a recent phenomenon, considering the fact that speech itself is as old as mankind. Though the Native Speaker's (NS) public speaking phobia may vary from that of the Non-Native Speaker (NNS), in Nigerian context, university students in other parts of the country are much more exposed to speaking in the public with a reasonable degree of confidence than their northern counterparts. In truth, most of these students fear to speak in English to their lecturers even if they have a question to ask, and whose answer could turn a stern face class smiling, during tutorial or class presentation hours superintended by their

lecturers, among themselves during daily social conversations, addressing their fellow students during a social gathering or during students' political rally and much more. So, why most Northern Nigerian university students fear to speak in the public? What is the nature and the genesis of this fear? What forms of fear do students experience when they speak? What happens when they are gripped by glossophobia? Is glossophobia natural or artificial? Do they make some efforts to get rid of this public speaking disaster? Couple with that, between male and female students who are more prone to glossophobia catastrophe? These are some of the questions this study hopes to find their answers in the three universities handpicked from North-West, North-East and North-central part of the country. These are Umaru Musa Yar'adua University Katsina, University of Maiduguri and the University of Jos.

Glossophobia: Definition Nature and Form

In the opinions of Hancock AB, Stone MD Brundage and SB Zeigler MT, the term glossophobia is derived from the Greek word *Glossa* which means tongue and *Phobos* which means fear (2010:303). According to Noreena Aslam, Shazia Hassan and Mahawish Raheed, glossophobia is a "technical term for speakers who suffer severe anxiety when they face the audience" (2019: 13005). It is thus a "strong fear in public speaking" (Larin R. Roland, Daraba S. Saima Agay S. Saipula, Dialona C. Cosma & Bombat B. Aluna: 2023 728). The fear seems inevitable for as Balakrishnan Subrati, Abdullah Loke Nurlisa, and Sui Khom Mei Linda argue, "public speaking has never been an easy task as it induces apprehension or nervousness even in the most experienced public speakers" (2022:3). In "Glossophobia: Causes and Remedies", Ahmad Dar, Bilal writes "according to 2014 Chapman University Survey on American fears, the fear of public speaking continues to top the list of the most common phobias in the country, slightly above the fear of heights in the second place and bugs and snakes in the third place" (2020:226). Consequently, it is deemed as one of the most common world fears. (Hancock AB *et al.*, 2010: 304, Ambit Relox Gay Apple & Pandayan Oglon Rose Mary 2021: 369). Couple with that, 75% of world

population experiences glossophobia (Hancock AB *et al.*, 2010: 304). Apart from speech anxiety, glossophobia is otherwise known as nervousness, speech apprehension, as well as stage fright. In stressing the pertinence of public speaking to our daily life in spite of the intense fear that grips most of us as we face a small or a large audience to speak, Oloba Babajide Peter, Tsidzumba Andani and Nkabane-Sekapo Lineo argue that it "is a crucial skill in both academic and professional setting, enabling individuals to express ideas, share knowledge and participate in important discussions" (2025:65). Let us shift our attention no glossophobia in institutions of higher learning.

The University World and Glossophobia

"For university students" Oloba B. P *et al.*, writes, "public speaking is an essential part of academic life" (2025:66). This is because, routine academic activities such as "oral presentations, debates, group discussions and classroom participation form a critical part of their learning process" (2025:77). These for them "are designed to enhance students' communication skills foster critical thinking and develop their ability to articulate ideas effectively" (2025:77). However, despite its pertinence, "a large number of students experience extreme discomfort during public speaking task (Zul Astri & Zulfitri Nurmadina 2025:124). According to Danseila Ali Solomon, Owusu Edward and Abdu Seidu Gordon, glossophobia has been observed to be a common phenomenon among students (2021:22). Balakrishnan Subrati *et al.*, disclose one learning context in which this fear is much more prevalent. For them, "glossophobia or the fear of public speaking is commonly experienced by tertiary learners during classroom presentations" (2022:1). This is because, "students are often required to deliver oral presentations, participate in debates and contribute to discussions, activities that demand clarity of thought, fluency and emotional control" (Zul Astri & Zulfitri Nurmadina 124). So, when speaking in front of their fellow students, they argue further, "especially in non-native language, students often struggle to access and produce language in real time, resulting in higher levels of glossophobia and reduce classroom engagements" (2025:129). The phobia not only

affects students' academic progress, but also hinders their professional development and social interactions (Oloba B. P *et al.*, (2025:66). In a parallel view, Ninarum Y.W. and Lestari M, argue that "students who struggle with public speaking fear due to fear of judgment often experience lower academic performance because university assessments require both written and oral contributions" (2024:42). Commenting on glossophobia and gender, Pollard C, & Henderson J, argue that "glossophobia affects both genders, however, female are likely to suffer more" (1988:45).

Causes of Glossophobia

There are several causes of glossophobia, below are some of the most common causes of this public speaking catastrophe.

1. Lack of preparation by the public speaker
2. The fear of judgment
3. Audience size
4. The fear of failure
5. Perfection
6. Xenoglossophobia (the fear to speak in a foreign language)
7. Lack of confidence
8. Lack of knowledge on certain subject
9. Lack of constant speaking experience
10. Insufficient vocabulary

(Oloba B. P *et al.*, 2025:71, Ahmad Dar 2020: 227, Densieh *et al.*, 2021:25).

Physical Manifestations of Glossophobia

The physical signs or symptoms of glossophobia encompass:

1. Shaking hands and voice trembling
2. Increased heart rate
3. Excessive sweating
4. Shortness of breath
5. Mouth dryness
6. A rise in blood pressure
7. Reddening of the face
8. Panic
9. Dizziness
10. Nausea

(Oloba B. P. *et al.*, 2025: 72, Hancock *et al.*, 2010: 304, Ninarum Y. W. & Lestari M, 2024: 44).

Ways to Overcome Glossophobia

Ahmad Dar provides seven ways as to how to overcome glossophobia,

1. Never avoid fear of public speaking but face it head on
2. Choose a topic that excites a passion greater than the fear of speaking
3. Focus on delivering a concise but forceful message and less on arousing a crowd
4. Keep your eyes on what is important: the mission, the people and the message
5. Practice and prepare extensively before making a speech in the public
6. Practice your speech in front of the mirror as if you are speaking directly to someone
7. Avoid being self-conscious when you face the audience to deliver a speech (2020:228).

The Objectives of the Research

The research sets out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To assess the prevalence of glossophobia in three Northern Nigerian Universities using survey data and focus group.
2. To examine the factors that may contribute to the development of glossophobia in these universities such as cultural norms, academic expectations and language barrier
3. To design and implement interventions to address glossophobia such as public speaking workshops, mentorship and evaluate their effectiveness to reduce the impact of glossophobia on the students.
4. To identify strategies for institutional support that can promote a culture of inclusivity
5. To document and disseminate the research findings, including best practices for addressing glossophobia and promoting students' success.

Research Questions

The followings are the research questions of this investigations

1. How prevalent is glossophobia in the three selected Northern Universities?

2. What are the factors that contribute to the development of glossophobia in these universities?
3. What are the most effective interventions for reducing the impacts of glossophobia?
4. What are the strategies for institutional support?
5. How can the findings be disseminate and documented?

Methodology

This study is a field work-based or quantitative, whose principal instruments are structured questionnaire and observation, all of which constitute its major source of primary data. The data will be collected from 300 respondents across different levels or disciplines in the three north-western Nigerian universities. The dataset will be analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis will involve reliability testing descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test, and A One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to produce the entire result of the study.

Results and Discussion: Overview of the Statistical Analysis

This section presents the statistical findings derived from the survey administered to undergraduate students in selected Northern Nigerian universities. The primary objective of the analysis is to examine the prevalence, manifestations, and demographic distribution of glossophobia, commonly referred to as public speaking anxiety. Glossophobia has long been recognized as a significant form of communication apprehension, defined as the level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with others (McCroskey, 1970:267). Numerous studies have demonstrated that communication apprehension negatively influences students' willingness to participate in classroom discussions, deliver presentations, and engage in collaborative academic activities (Bodie, 2010:70, Hancock *et al.*, 2010:302). A total of 300 valid responses were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis involved reliability

testing, descriptive statistics, prevalence estimation, independent samples t-tests, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). These techniques are widely employed in studies investigating communication anxiety and language-related classroom apprehension (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986: 126, Bodie, 2010:75).

Reliability Analysis of the Glossophobia Scale

Before conducting the primary statistical analysis, a Cronbach's alpha reliability test was performed to evaluate the internal consistency of the questionnaire items measuring glossophobia.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics for Glossophobia Scale

Statistic	Value
Number of items	14
Cronbach's Alpha	0.804

The reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .804$ indicates good internal consistency. According to Nunnally (1978), alpha values above 0.70 are considered acceptable for research in the social sciences. This result confirms that the items included in the questionnaire reliably measure the construct of public speaking anxiety. Similar reliability levels have been reported in earlier studies examining communication apprehension using survey instruments (McCroskey, 1970:270, Bodie, 2010:80).

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents (N = 300)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	142	47.3
Female	158	52.7
Total	300	100

The distribution of respondents indicates a relatively balanced gender composition, with slightly more female respondents than male respondents. This balanced representation allows meaningful comparison of glossophobia across gender groups.

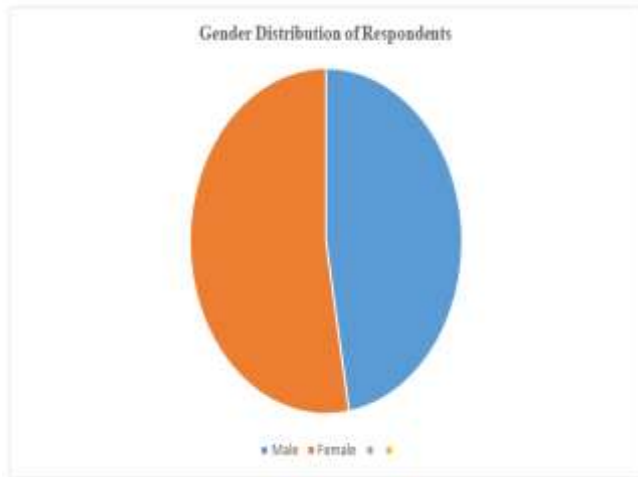


Figure 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

The relatively balanced gender composition strengthens the reliability of subsequent comparative analyses examining the role of gender in communication anxiety.

Prevalence of Glossophobia among Students

To determine the prevalence of glossophobia among the respondents, students were asked whether they feel nervous when speaking in public.

Table 3: Students' Nervousness When Speaking in Public

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	45	15.0
Agree	132	44.0
Neutral	32	10.7
Disagree	54	18.0
Strongly Disagree	37	12.3

The results reveal that 59% of the respondents reported experiencing nervousness when speaking in public (agree or strongly agree). This finding clearly demonstrates that glossophobia is a widespread phenomenon among undergraduate students. The prevalence observed in this study is consistent with previous international research showing that public speaking anxiety is one of the most commonly reported fears among university students (Bodie, 2010:85). For instance, Bodie (2010:86) reports that communication apprehension affects a substantial proportion of individuals in educational contexts and may significantly impede academic performance and

interpersonal communication. Similarly, Hancock *et al.*, (2010) found that students frequently report anxiety during oral presentations, particularly when speaking in front of peers or instructors.

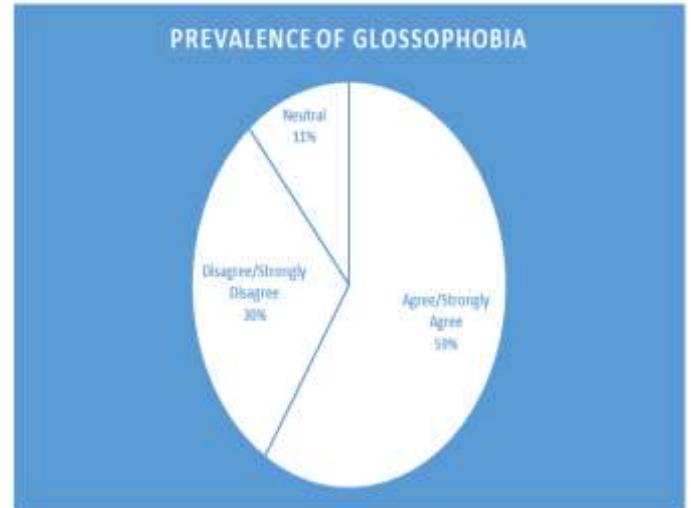


Figure 2: Prevalence of Glossophobia

The prevalence rate recorded in this study suggests that glossophobia constitutes a significant communication barrier within the university environment.

Descriptive Analysis of Glossophobia Indicators

To identify the primary manifestations of glossophobia among the respondents, descriptive statistics were calculated for selected questionnaire items.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Key Glossophobia Indicators

Item	Mean	Std. Dev
Nervous when speaking publicly	3.31	1.12
Avoid speaking during lectures	3.39	1.16
Anxiety during oral presentations	3.28	1.14
Fear of asking questions	3.00	1.18
Fear of making mistakes in English	3.42	1.13
Lack of confidence	3.55	1.09
Fear of classmates' reaction	3.14	1.20
Fear of lecturer criticism	3.05	1.17

The descriptive statistics reveal several significant indicators of glossophobia among the respondents. Among the variables examined, lack of confidence recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.55$), suggesting that students perceive low self-confidence as the most significant contributor to public speaking anxiety. This finding aligns with previous research highlighting fear of negative evaluation and lack of self-confidence as major predictors of communication apprehension (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986:127, Bodie, 2010:91). Students who lack confidence in their linguistic or communicative abilities are more likely to avoid public speaking situations.



Figure 3: Mean Scores of Major Glossophobia Indicators

These results suggest that psychological factors play a central role in shaping students' communication anxiety.

Gender Differences in Glossophobia

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether glossophobia differs significantly between male and female students.

Table 5: Mean Glossophobia Scores by Gender

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Male	142	2.97	0.69
Female	158	3.01	0.66

Table 6: Independent Samples t-Test

Statistic	Value
T	-0.50
P	.616
Cohen's d	0.06

The results indicate no statistically significant difference in glossophobia between male and female students ($p > .05$). The calculated effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.06$) indicates a very small effect, suggesting that gender plays a minimal role in determining students' levels of public speaking anxiety. Previous studies have produced mixed findings regarding gender differences in communication apprehension. While some researchers report higher anxiety levels among female students, others find no significant gender differences (Bodie, 2010:100, Hancock *et al.*, 2010:305). The present study supports the latter conclusion.

Glossophobia Across Academic Levels

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether glossophobia differs across academic levels.

Table 7: ANOVA Results

Source	SS	df	F	P
Between Groups	1.98	4	1.05	.379
Within Groups	139.23	295		

Effect Size

Eta squared (η^2) = **0.007**

The ANOVA results show no statistically significant differences in glossophobia across academic levels ($p > .05$). The effect size ($\eta^2 = .007$) is extremely small, indicating that academic level accounts for less than 1% of the variance in glossophobia. Therefore, this finding suggests that communication anxiety remains relatively stable throughout students' academic careers. Similar conclusions have been reported in earlier studies examining communication apprehension in higher education (McCroskey, 1970:274, Bodie, 2010:101).

Major Findings

The findings of this study confirm that glossophobia is highly prevalent among undergraduate students in Northern Nigerian universities. Approximately six out of every ten students reported experiencing nervousness when speaking in public. The analysis also reveals that lack of confidence is the strongest contributor to public speaking anxiety. This observation supports the theoretical framework proposed by Horwitz *et al.*, (1986:129), which

emphasizes the role of fear of negative evaluation in shaping communication anxiety. Furthermore, the absence of statistically significant gender or academic-level differences suggests that glossophobia is a systemic issue affecting students across demographic categories.

CONCLUSION

This findings imply that interventions aimed at addressing communication anxiety should target the broader student population rather than specific demographic groups. Educational institutions can address this problem by implementing structured interventions such as public speaking training programmes, communication skills workshops, classroom participation strategies and peer mentoring initiatives. Research has shown that such interventions can significantly reduce communication apprehension and improve students' confidence in public speaking contexts (Hancock et al., 2010:306).

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