

## Exploring EFL Students' Perceptions of Public Speaking Skills Through a News Anchor Performance Activity

Pipit Rahayu<sup>1</sup>, Eripuddin<sup>2</sup>, Yova Afriansyah<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Pasir Pengaraian, Rokan Hulu, Indonesia; darariau2010@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Pasir Pengaraian, Rokan Hulu, Indonesia; [eripuddin85@gmail.com](mailto:eripuddin85@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> Universitas Pasir Pengaraian, Rokan Hulu, Indonesia; [yovaafriansyah222@gmail.com](mailto:yovaafriansyah222@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

Developing effective public speaking skills is a key objective in English language education, yet many university students experience anxiety and limited opportunities for structured practice. This study investigates students' perceptions of public speaking skill development through a News Anchor activity implemented in a natural classroom setting. This qualitative study involved 25 second-semester undergraduate students enrolled in a Public Speaking course at the English Department of Pasir Pengaraian University. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, reflective journals, and analysis of students' scripts and recorded performances. The data were analyzed thematically, and triangulation across multiple sources was applied to ensure credibility and consistency. The findings reveal three major themes: increased confidence, improved delivery techniques, and stronger language organization. The structured news anchor activity provided students with a clear communicative role and opportunities for repeated rehearsal, which helped reduce anxiety and improve voice projection, pacing, fluency, eye contact, posture, and gestures. Analysis of students' scripts also indicated clearer content organization and more appropriate use of news-style expressions. Although some pronunciation challenges persisted, students demonstrated greater strategic use of practice and feedback. Overall, the News Anchor activity functioned as an effective performance-based learning strategy that supports the development of public speaking skills. By combining structured roles, rehearsal, and authentic speaking practice, the activity provides a practical approach to enhancing students' confidence, delivery, and language organization in higher education public speaking courses.

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### Corresponding Author:

Pipit Rahayu

Universitas Pasir Pengaraian, Rokan Hulu, Indonesia; darariau2010@gmail.com

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In many EFL higher education settings, students are expected to perform formal presentations and academic speeches, yet they often face significant public speaking anxiety and lack sufficient opportunities for authentic, performance-based practice. The main challenge lies not only in language proficiency, but in students' inability to deliver ideas confidently and effectively before an audience.

Learners frequently experience nervousness, fear of negative evaluation, unclear pronunciation, hesitation, and limited fluency in formal speaking contexts (Huang et al., 2025), problems that are intensified by minimal exposure to real communicative situations outside the classroom (Bárkányi & Brash, 2025). In this study, public speaking skill is defined as a multidimensional competence that integrates delivery skills (voice projection, pacing, fluency, clarity), language use (vocabulary, grammatical control, and appropriate news-style register), non-verbal communication (eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions), and audience awareness (logical organization, engagement strategies, and responsiveness). Thus, public speaking is conceptualized not merely as linguistic accuracy, but as a performance-based communicative competence that reflects cognitive, physical, and affective readiness.

In academic settings, the ability to articulate ideas verbally is widely regarded as a critical component of students' overall communicative competence (Harahap & Rozimela, 2021; Rahayu, 2015a). Speech is comprised of various components, and public speaking is of particular importance due to its role in formal situations in which the individual is required to address an audience (Amelia et al., 2022; Rahayu et al., 2022; Rahayu & Eripuddin, 2023). The ability to competently engage in public speaking entails the integration of linguistic components, including but not limited to pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and grammatical accuracy. In addition to these linguistic elements, non-linguistic components such as confidence, eye contact, body language, and speech organization are also crucial for effective public speaking. Consequently, public speaking is not merely a technical language skill; it is also a performance-based competence that reflects students' academic readiness.

Despite the significance of public speaking skills, many students continue to confront substantial challenges when required to articulate themselves in English within formal academic settings. Students often encounter challenges related to unclear pronunciation, frequent pauses, inadequate fluency, limited control over formal vocabulary, and improper speech structure. In addition to linguistic challenges, affective factors such as anxiety, nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and fear of negative evaluation frequently emerge when students are asked to speak in front of an audience (Huang et al., 2025). These barriers can have a substantial impact on students' confidence and inclination to engage in public speaking activities.

Within the domain of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), these challenges assume a heightened degree of complexity. Students frequently encounter a paucity of authentic English-speaking environments, leading them to rely predominantly on classroom instruction as their principal source of language input (Bárkányi & Brash, 2025; Hadi & Syafira Junor, 2022; Qizi & Gayratovna, 2021). While many students demonstrate sufficient proficiency in English grammar and vocabulary, they may encounter challenges in applying these competencies to real-time oral communication, particularly in formal settings that demand accuracy, fluency, and confidence. Consequently, students may encounter difficulties in showcasing their authentic speaking proficiency during public performances.

In order to address these studies, some studies explore that English language instruction must incorporate learning activities that provide students with meaningful and authentic speaking experiences (Gomez et al., 2022; Meinawati et al., 2020; Rahayu, 2015b; Students et al., 2003). A pedagogical activity that has been demonstrated to facilitate the cultivation of public speaking aptitudes is the News Anchor activity. In this activity, students are required to perform as news presenters who deliver information in a formal, structured, and professional manner. This activity has been designed to promote the development of students' linguistic skills, including pronunciation, fluency, intonation, eye contact, body language, and confidence in public speaking (Fourati et al., 2025; Schreiber et al., 2018). Furthermore, the News Anchor activity instructs students in the proper use of formal language and the structured delivery of oration, both of which are pivotal components of public speaking within academic settings.

Nevertheless, the efficacy of a learning activity cannot be determined exclusively through the analysis of teachers' observations or students' performance scores. The perception of students is of particular consequence in understanding the influence of a given learning activity on their learning

experience (Hendrickson & Goh, 2024). Students' perceptions are indicative of their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and responses toward a particular instructional activity. By examining students' perceptions, researchers can gain deeper insights into how students experience the News Anchor activity, how they perceive its impact on their public speaking skills, and what challenges or benefits they encounter during the learning process.

Then, link to news anchor performance activity as a central role in academic communication in higher education, where students are required to deliver presentations, participate in seminars, and speak in formal forums using clear and structured language (Liang & Ahn, 2025; Phyak, 2023). In these contexts, public speaking competence extends beyond grammatical knowledge. It involves the integration of pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary control, speech organization, confidence, eye contact, and body language (Amelia et al., 2022; Rahayu & Eripuddin, 2023). Despite these expectations, many students struggle with unclear delivery, limited fluency, and high levels of anxiety when speaking in front of an audience (Huang et al., 2025). In EFL environments, these difficulties are intensified by limited exposure to authentic English-speaking situations, making classroom-based performance practice essential (Bárkányi & Brash, 2025).

However, although numerous studies assess speaking tasks through test scores, experimental designs, or teacher evaluations, fewer studies investigate students' perceptions of genre-based speaking activities in depth. Research tends to emphasize measurable performance outcomes rather than how learners interpret their own development, manage anxiety, or experience structured speaking practice. Moreover, limited attention has been given to studies that employ triangulated qualitative evidence such as interviews, reflective journals, classroom observations, and artifact analysis—to examine a news-anchor genre task comprehensively. Without such triangulation, understandings of speaking development may remain partial and overly dependent on surface-level performance indicators.

Therefore, there is a need for research that explores how students perceive the News Anchor activity and how these perceptions align with observable classroom behaviors and documentary evidence. By integrating interviews, reflections, observations, and script artifacts, this study seeks to provide a more holistic understanding of how a structured, genre-based speaking task supports public speaking competence and anxiety management in EFL higher education contexts.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine how an individual News Anchor activity supported the development of students' public speaking skills within a natural classroom context. A qualitative approach was selected to capture both perceptual and behavioral dimensions of development, including confidence growth, delivery refinement, genre awareness, and anxiety regulation. The design integrates multiple data sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' learning processes over time.

The study was conceptually informed by self-efficacy theory (mastery experiences), performance framing through role identity, genre-based speaking pedagogy, and foreign language speaking anxiety research. These frameworks guided instrument development, data analysis, and thematic interpretation.

### 2.2 Research Setting

The study was conducted in a Public Speaking course at a private higher education institution in Indonesia. The course is a compulsory subject for second-semester undergraduate students in the English Education program. The News Anchor activity was implemented over four dedicated meetings within a 16-week semester, spanning approximately eight weeks including preparation, rehearsal, performance, and reflection stages. Each meeting lasted 100 minutes. The activity was embedded into

the regular course syllabus rather than introduced as an experimental intervention. Maintaining the natural classroom setting enhanced ecological validity and ensured that students' perceptions reflected authentic instructional practice.

### **2.3 Participants and Sampling**

Participants consisted of 25 second-semester undergraduate students (N = 25), aged 18–20 years. Based on institutional placement records and course performance, students were at lower-intermediate to intermediate English proficiency levels. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants had fully completed the individual News Anchor performance cycle (script preparation, rehearsal, performance, and reflection). Variation in observed confidence levels and performance quality was considered to capture diverse perspectives.

From the full class, 12 students were selected for in-depth semi-structured interviews to represent different confidence and performance profiles (high, moderate, and developing speakers). All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation.

### **2.4 News Anchor Activity Procedure**

The News Anchor task was implemented as an individual performance-based assignment to allow consistent measurement of mastery experiences and speaking development. The structured activity cycle included:

- a. **Modeling and Genre Orientation**  
Students were introduced to conventions of news reporting, including structured organization (opening–headline–details–closing), professional tone, pacing, voice clarity, posture, and audience engagement. Teacher modeling and short video examples were used.
- b. **Individual Script Development**  
Each student independently developed a news script on selected topics (e.g., education, campus events, social issues). Emphasis was placed on coherence, audience awareness, and appropriate vocabulary.
- c. **Rehearsal and Feedback**  
Students engaged in guided rehearsal sessions. Peer and teacher feedback focused on pronunciation, fluency, pacing, eye contact, and posture. Feedback was structured using clear performance indicators.
- d. **Individual Performance**  
Students delivered their news report individually in front of the class. Performances were video-recorded with consent to support reflection and document analysis.
- e. **Reflection and Interview**  
Students completed written reflections after performance. Selected participants engaged in follow-up interviews to explore perceived development.

### **2.5 Data Collection**

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to strengthen credibility through triangulation:

- a. **Semi-Structured Interviews**  
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants after the completion of the News Anchor task. A total of students were interviewed based on purposive criteria, including variation in speaking confidence and performance levels. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. The interviews explored students' perceptions of their public speaking development, confidence changes, challenges encountered, and the perceived effectiveness of the News Anchor activity. Follow-up questions were used to gain deeper clarification and rich descriptions.

b. Classroom Observations

Classroom observations were carried out throughout the implementation of the News Anchor activity, including script preparation, rehearsal sessions, and final performances. The researcher used structured observation sheets and detailed field notes to document students' verbal and non-verbal behaviors, such as voice projection, fluency, eye contact, gestures, posture, interaction, and engagement. Observations allowed the researcher to compare students' expressed perceptions with their observable performance behaviors.

c. Reflective Journals

After completing the News Anchor performance, all participants were asked to write reflective journals. The reflections were guided by prompts designed to elicit students' insights about what they learned, what improved, what remained challenging, and how the activity influenced their confidence and delivery skills. These written reflections provided personal and introspective data that complemented interview findings.

d. Analysis of Students' Scripts and Recorded Performances

Students' prepared news scripts and recorded performances (with permission) were collected as supporting artifacts. Script analysis focused on organization, vocabulary choice, coherence, and language accuracy, while performance recordings were examined to identify patterns in delivery techniques, pronunciation, pacing, and audience engagement. These artifacts served as concrete evidence to support or contrast students' self-reported perceptions, thereby strengthening data triangulation and overall trustworthiness of the study.

## 2.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis process:

- a. Data Preparation: Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. Observation notes, reflections, and documents were compiled and organized.
- b. Familiarization: The researcher read the transcripts and written data repeatedly to understand the overall meaning.
- c. Initial Coding: Key phrases and sentences were labeled with codes representing important ideas (e.g., "increased confidence," "pronunciation challenge," "peer support," "anxiety reduction," "improved eye contact").
- d. Category Development: Similar codes were grouped into broader categories such as confidence, delivery technique, language control, and classroom engagement.
- e. Theme Generation: Categories were refined into themes that answered the research focus, such as perceived improvement in fluency, reduced speaking anxiety, enhanced audience awareness, and motivation through role-play.

## 2.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional research committee prior to data collection. Participants signed informed consent forms detailing study purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw without penalty. Pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity. Audio and video recordings were collected only with explicit permission and stored in password-protected digital files accessible solely to the researcher. Data will be securely stored for five years and permanently deleted in accordance with institutional policy.

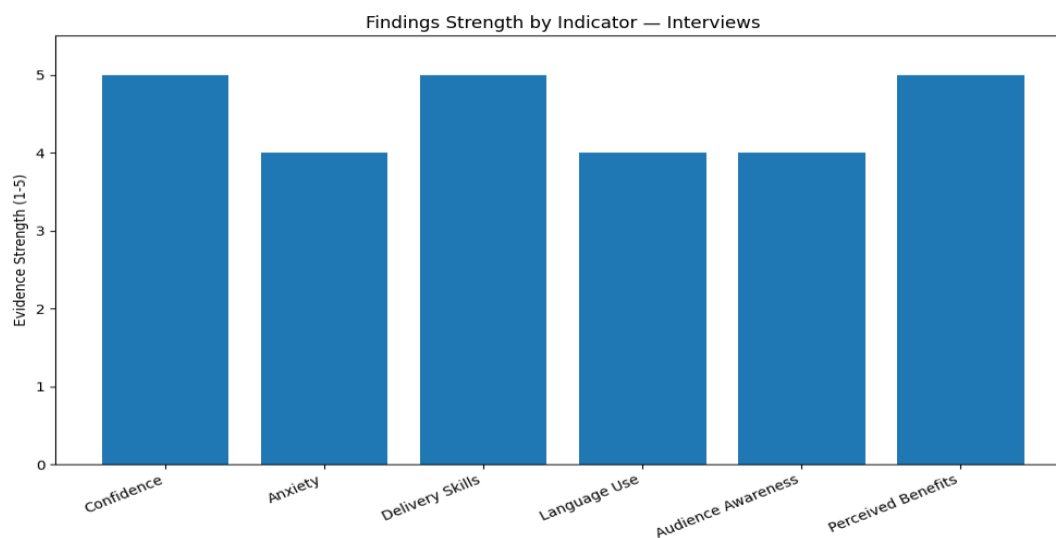
## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Findings

The findings are shown through four graphics that represent evidence from interviews, classroom observations, reflections, and document analysis of the News Anchor activity.

### Theme 1: Confidence and self-efficacy growth

The interview graphic indicates that confidence, delivery skills, and perceived benefits were the most strongly reported outcomes, while anxiety, language use, and audience awareness were also consistently mentioned as follows.



**Figure 1.** Findings from Indicators Interview

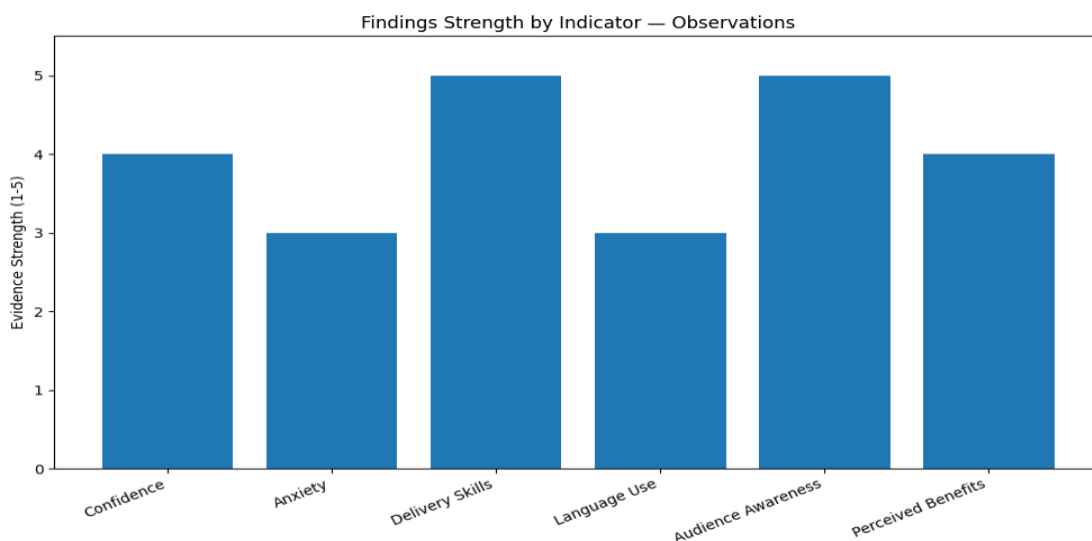
The graphic represents Confidence and self-efficacy emerged as the most dominant theme. Many students stated that repeated rehearsal and structured performance opportunities made them feel “braver to speak in front of others” and “more prepared, so less afraid of making mistakes.” One participant explained, “*At first, I was very nervous, but after practicing and performing, I felt more confident to speak clearly.*” This perception was supported by observation field notes indicating increased eye contact, stronger voice projection, and reduced reliance on written scripts during final performances compared to initial rehearsals.

Artifacts further reinforced this pattern. Early script drafts contained detailed pronunciation notes and hesitation markers, while later drafts were more streamlined, suggesting growing familiarity and self-assurance. Although anxiety (4) remained evident—students still mentioned nervousness—it was often described as “manageable” rather than paralyzing. Similarly, themes of language use (4) and audience awareness (4) reflected students’ growing attention to vocabulary selection, pacing, gestures, posture, and facial expression.

Overall, the convergence of interview statements, field-note excerpts, and script artifacts indicates that the News Anchor activity was widely perceived as fostering confidence and strengthening public speaking performance, while also contributing to language development, audience engagement, and improved anxiety regulation.

### Theme 2: Delivery improvements

The observation graphic shows the most visible improvements in delivery skills and audience awareness during students’ actual performances, with moderate signs of confidence and remaining anxiety.



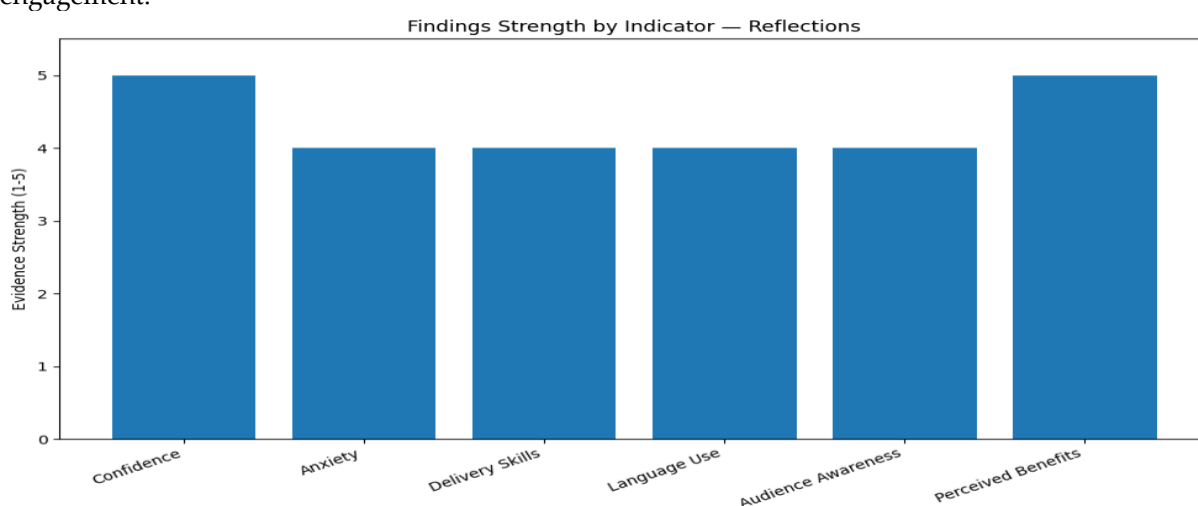
**Figure 2.** Findings from Indicators Observation

The observation graphic summarizes what was Delivery skills showed the clearest observable progression. Field notes from early rehearsals describe “low voice projection, frequent pauses, and reading directly from the script,” while final performance notes indicate “clearer articulation, steadier pacing, and smoother transitions between segments.” Video artifacts similarly show reduced hesitation and more natural intonation patterns.

Participants’ reflections align with these observations. One student noted, “I learned how to control my voice and not speak too fast.” Another stated, “After practicing many times, my speaking became more fluent.” A third shared, “I tried to sound like a real news anchor, so I practiced my pronunciation carefully.” Script drafts also evolved: early versions included phonetic spellings and stress markings, whereas later drafts showed fewer pronunciation cues, suggesting greater fluency and preparation.

**Theme 3: Audience awareness and non-verbal control**

The reflection graphic highlights students’ internal change, emphasizing increased confidence and strong perceived benefits, alongside consistent awareness of anxiety, delivery, language, and audience engagement.



**Figure 3.** Findings from Indicator Reflection

The reflection graphic (Graphic 3) summarizes that audience awareness was equally strong in observational data. Field notes document “increased eye contact with classmates,” “more upright

posture,” and “controlled hand gestures rather than random movements.” In recorded performances, several students shifted from rigid stance to more natural, anchor-like positioning behind a desk or podium.

In addition, the students recognized this shift. One participant explained, “*I became more aware of my body language.*” Another commented, “*I tried to look at the audience, not only at my paper.*” A third stated, “*I learned that facial expression is important so the news does not look boring.*” These statements correspond with artifact evidence, such as revised scripts including pauses for emphasis and cues like “(smile)” or “(serious tone).”

The data shows that confidence (4) was also visible, reflected in stronger stage presence and students’ ability to continue speaking after minor mistakes. Field notes mention that “students who previously hesitated were able to recover quickly and complete their segment.” Meanwhile, Anxiety (3) appeared moderately, observed through occasional fidgeting or rushed delivery, and Language Use (3) was less prominently visible in behavior, though supported by script revisions and verbal accuracy during performance. Overall, the observation findings highlight that the News Anchor activity was most clearly associated with observable enhancements in delivery technique and audience engagement, while anxiety regulation and language development were present but less prominently captured through behavioral evidence alone.

#### Theme 4: Language and genre learning

The document graphic demonstrates that language use was the strongest written evidence, supported by improved script organization, news-style expressions, and delivery-planning annotations.

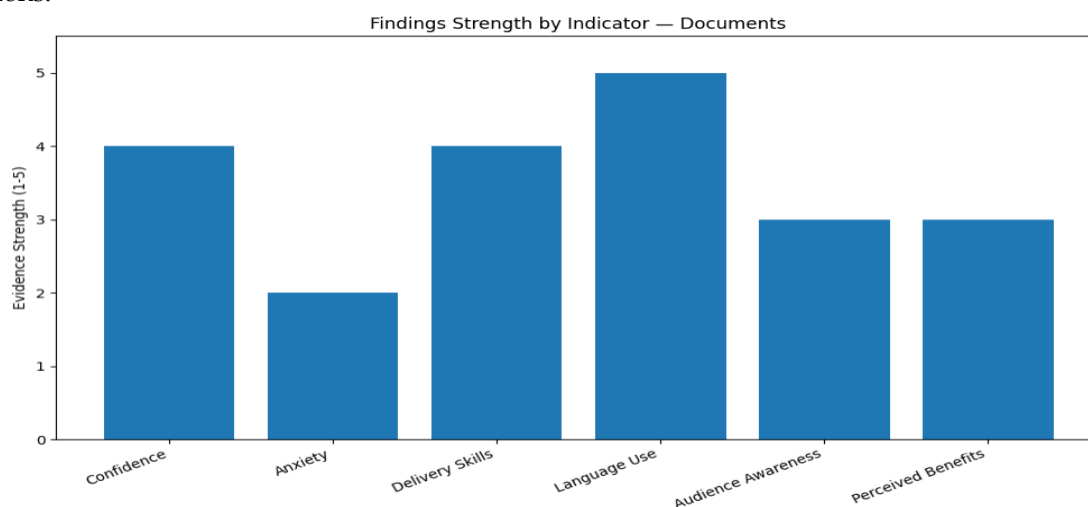


Figure 4. Finding from Indicator Document

The graphic 4 summarizes evidence gathered from students’ script drafts, final scripts, revision notes, peer and teacher feedback sheets, and delivery-planning annotations created during the News Anchor activity. The most prominent indicator is Language Use (5), as written artifacts most clearly show development in news register and script structure. Initial drafts often contained informal wording and loosely connected sentences, whereas final versions demonstrated more formal openings (e.g., greetings to viewers), clearer transitions between segments, and concise, well-structured closings. One student reflected, “*I changed my words to sound more formal like real news,*” which aligns with documented revisions replacing casual expressions with reporting-style language. Feedback sheets frequently included comments such as “revise for clarity” and “shorten sentence for impact,” indicating deliberate refinement of language.

Confidence (4) and Delivery Skills (4) are reflected indirectly through preparation strategies. Scripts evolved into shorter, keyword-focused formats, suggesting intentional simplification to

facilitate smoother delivery. Annotations such as highlighted keywords, pause symbols (/), capitalization for emphasis, and cues like “(slow)” reveal planning for pacing and clarity. Students explained, “I made my script simpler so I wouldn’t panic,” and “I underlined important words to speak more fluently.” Field notes further show that annotated scripts reduced dependence on full-text reading during performance.

By contrast, Anxiety (2) is less visible in documents, as emotional states are rarely recorded explicitly. Occasional notes like “practice more” imply concern, yet nervousness is more evident in interviews and observations. Audience Awareness (3) and Perceived Benefits (3) appear moderately through cues encouraging eye contact or clearer phrasing for listeners, though these are secondary to linguistic revisions.

Taken together, findings across all four graphics suggest that the News Anchor activity was associated with both affective growth and performance development. Interviews and reflections highlight perceived confidence gains and improved anxiety control, observations confirm visible improvements in delivery and audience engagement, and document analysis provides concrete evidence of enhanced language preparation. These outcomes represent perceived and observed classroom developments rather than causal effects, indicating that the task served as a structured and realistic speaking practice supported by feedback and revision.

### 3.2 Discussion

The result shows that the News Anchor activity supported public speaking development through interconnected affective, cognitive, and performance-based processes. Across instruments, confidence, delivery skills, and perceived benefits emerged as dominant themes, suggesting that the activity functioned not only as a speaking task but also as a structured developmental cycle. The convergence of behavioral, perceptual, and artifact-based evidence strengthens the credibility of this interpretation and aligns with qualitative principles of triangulation (Fourati et al., 2025; Hidayat & Purwanti, 2023; Schreiber et al., 2018).

Furthermore, a central outcome was increased confidence, which can be theoretically explained through self-efficacy theory. Repeated rehearsal combined with successful public performances provided mastery experiences that strengthened students’ beliefs in their speaking capability (Altynbekova & Zhussupova, 2020a; Fehlmann et al., 2023). Rather than relying on encouragement alone, learners built confidence through concrete evidence of improvement. As they connected preparation efforts to smoother delivery and clearer organization, they developed stronger perceived competence and greater willingness to participate (Huang et al., 2025).

Then, the confidence growth was closely connected to the structured nature of the task. Because the News Anchor activity required preparation, rehearsal, and staged performance, students could observe incremental progress across attempts. Such visible improvement reinforced self-efficacy by transforming speaking from a high-risk event into a manageable, practice-based process (Altynbekova & Zhussupova, 2020a). Reflections particularly highlighted this shift, with students evaluating their progress across cycles rather than judging themselves based on a single performance.

Besides, the role identity played a crucial psychological function in reducing self-consciousness. Adopting the “news anchor” persona provided performance framing and task scaffolding, offering a clear communicative identity and audience expectation (Hidayat & Purwanti, 2023; Iberri-Shea, 2017; Schreiber et al., 2018). This framing shifted students’ focus from “How am I being judged?” to “How should a news anchor deliver this message?” By externalizing the role, learners reduced self-focused attention and stabilized performance behaviors, a pattern supported by both interview accounts and observational data.

In addition, delivery improvements were another consistent theme across instruments. Observable gains in voice projection, pacing, fluency, eye contact, posture, and gesture control were documented in field notes and confirmed by students’ self-reports. These improvements can be interpreted through structured practice–feedback cycles, in which learners refined performance

through iterative rehearsal, feedback interpretation, and adjustment (Gorinelli et al., 2023; Hendrickson & Goh, 2024). The repeated nature of the task allowed for gradual technical refinement rather than one-time evaluation.

Importantly, the genre-based design of the activity strengthened delivery development. Because news reporting has recognizable conventions—formal tone, structured organization, controlled pacing—students had clear performance models to emulate (Huang et al., 2025; Sülter et al., 2022). Document analysis showed increasing alignment with genre structure (opening–headline–details–closing) and richer use of news-style expressions, indicating that language development was integrated with performance expectations (Zhao, 2013). This alignment between genre awareness and oral delivery contributed to measurable growth.

Furthermore, anxiety remained present but evolved in nature. In line with foreign language classroom anxiety theory, students reported fear of mistakes and negative evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986; Wang et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2024). However, rather than disappearing, anxiety became reduced and more manageable. Interviews and reflections revealed increased coping strategies such as repeated rehearsal, peer support, and script simplification, while observations showed fewer visible anxiety behaviors over time (Bartyzel et al., 2025; Hanafi et al., 2020; Mendoza et al., 2016). This pattern suggests emotional regulation through familiarity and mastery experiences.

In addition, the interaction between confidence and anxiety is particularly significant. As self-efficacy strengthened through mastery experiences, perceived threat decreased. Students did not report becoming entirely fearless; instead, they described feeling more prepared and more in control. This aligns with research suggesting that anxiety in speaking contexts can be mitigated through structured exposure and supportive performance environments rather than eliminated completely (Wang et al., 2020; Tai & Lee, 2024).

Document evidence further reinforces the iterative nature of learning. Script revisions, simplification strategies, and delivery-planning annotations (pause marks, emphasis cues, highlighted keywords) demonstrate intentional regulation of performance components (Altynbekova & Zhussupova, 2020b; Dinarty et al., 2018; Fehlmann et al., 2023). These artifacts serve as concrete traces of learning decisions, confirming that improvement resulted from sustained practice and feedback cycles rather than spontaneous change (Guerra-Macías & Tobón, 2025).

Overall, the triangulated findings indicate that the News Anchor activity supported public speaking development through four interconnected mechanisms: mastery-based confidence building, performance framing via role identity, genre-informed delivery practice, and gradual anxiety management. The structured integration of rehearsal, feedback, and authentic communicative purpose created a coherent learning cycle that strengthened both affective and technical dimensions of public speaking. This convergence across instruments enhances the trustworthiness of the findings and demonstrates how performance-based, genre-structured tasks can systematically foster speaking competence in higher education contexts (Fourati et al., 2025; Hidayat & Purwanti, 2023; Schreiber et al., 2018).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that the News Anchor activity effectively enhances students' public speaking skills by increasing confidence and improving delivery and script organization. Students showed notable progress in voice projection, pacing, fluency, audience awareness, and the use of news-style language, although some continued to experience anxiety and pronunciation difficulties. In practice, the activity can be implemented through a structured speaking cycle involving modeling authentic news delivery, guided script writing, rehearsals, and staged performances, supported by clear peer and teacher feedback focusing on aspects such as voice clarity, eye contact, and posture. The use of video recordings and script revision checkpoints further promotes self-reflection, delivery awareness, and language accuracy within a supportive classroom environment. However, the study is limited by its short duration and single-class context, suggesting that future research should explore longer-term

implementation, compare different anchoring formats, and examine the impact of various feedback approaches on sustained public speaking development.

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