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# Bridging the Gap between Reading and Presenting: Examining Psychological Constraints and Adaptive Coping Strategies in EFL Academic Presentations

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**A B S T R A C T**

Why do students who understand effective presentation practices still rely on reading from slides? This study investigates the cognitive, affective, and strategic factors behind this discrepancy in EFL academic presentations. Using a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, data were collected from 16 Indonesian undergraduate students through Likert-scale questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings offer three main contributions. First, text dependency is reconceptualized not as a performance deficit, but as a strategy to stabilize performance. Students use slides to maintain fluency and reduce anxiety during real-time communication. Second, the study identifies a persistent affective–cognitive disjunction, where anxiety operates independently of content mastery and can override metacognitive intentions during presentations. Third, the study documents the emergence of AI-mediated coping, in which students use generative AI tools as real-time cognitive support during moments of uncertainty. This reveals a previously underexplored form of distributed performance regulation. Overall, the findings reconceptualize the knowing–doing gap as a multidimensional system shaped by the interaction of cognition, affect, and technology. Based on these findings, the study proposes the PACE Framework (Psychological–Affective–Cognitive–Ecological AI) as a pedagogical model to support adaptive and authentic communication in AI-mediated learning environments. The study contributes to extending Communication Apprehension theory into digital contexts and advances a distributed cognition perspective on L2 oral performance. Pedagogically, it highlights the importance of integrated approaches that address not only speaking skills, but also affective regulation, cognitive load management, and ethical AI use in academic communication.

**Keywords:** *EFL Academic Presentations, Knowing–Doing Gap, Speaking Anxiety, AI-Mediated Coping, Distributed Cognition, Mixed Methods*

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## INTRODUCTION

Oral academic presentation has become a core competency in higher education, particularly within English Language Teaching (ELT) programs, where students are expected to demonstrate not only linguistic proficiency but also higher-order thinking, audience engagement, and communicative clarity in dynamic academic settings. In contemporary pedagogical contexts, presentations are increasingly conceptualized as multidimensional performances that integrate cognitive processing, rhetorical competence, and interactional responsiveness (Portugal-Toro et al. 2025; Shang and Ma 2024; Zhang and Zhang 2022). However, despite this recognition, a persistent pedagogical issue remains: many students continue to rely heavily on reading text from slides rather than engaging in authentic, interactive presentation practices.

This phenomenon reflects a critical discrepancy between conceptual understanding and actual performance, often described as a knowing-doing gap, where declarative knowledge does not translate into procedural enactment (Portugal-Toro et al. 2025; Rycroft-Smith 2022; Zhang and Zhang 2022). Students generally demonstrate awareness of

effective presentation principles such as paraphrasing, audience engagement, and reduced textual dependency, yet in practice, they frequently treat slides as a script, resulting in monotonous delivery and diminished communicative effectiveness. This gap is particularly salient in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where linguistic limitations, cognitive demands, and affective constraints converge to shape oral performance (Shang and Ma 2024; Wu 2019; Zhang and Zhang 2022).

From an affective perspective, Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) has been consistently identified as a major inhibitor of oral performance, as learners experience fear of negative evaluation, linguistic inaccuracy, and public exposure (Shang and Ma 2024; Sun 2023; Wu 2019). These affective pressures often lead students to adopt risk-avoidance strategies, including reliance on scripted speech and reduced improvisation. From a cognitive standpoint, this behavior can be further explained through Cognitive Load Theory, which posits that complex tasks such as real-time L2 speech production impose significant demands on working memory, prompting learners to engage in cognitive offloading by externalizing information through visual aids (Akram and Ahmed 2025; Archer-Kuhn et al. 2021; Phillips and Condy 2023; Sun 2023; Sweller 2023). In this sense, reading from slides may function not merely as a deficiency, but as an adaptive mechanism to regulate cognitive burden under performance pressure.

In parallel, the role of self-efficacy has been widely discussed as a key predictor of speaking performance, with higher levels of perceived competence associated with increased confidence and willingness to communicate (I.-J. Chen et al. 2022; Shang and Ma 2024; Sun 2023; Wu 2019). However, emerging evidence suggests that self-efficacy operates in interaction with anxiety and task complexity, rather than as a direct determinant of performance outcomes. This indicates that students may possess adequate content knowledge and even moderate confidence, yet still rely on text due to the combined influence of affective and cognitive constraints.

Despite these theoretical advances, existing studies tend to examine psychological, cognitive, or performance-related factors in isolation, resulting in a fragmented understanding of students' presentation behavior (Archer-Kuhn et al. 2021; Phillips and Condy 2023; Shang and Ma 2024; Sun 2023). There remains a lack of integrative research that simultaneously connects students' perceptions of presentation, their psychological constraints, and their adaptive strategies within real-time academic performance contexts. More importantly, the rapid advancement of digital technology particularly the emergence of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) has begun to reshape learning behaviors in ways that are not yet fully theorized in ELT research.

A particularly notable development is the increasing use of AI tools such as ChatGPT as a form of real-time cognitive support during academic presentations. Unlike traditional coping strategies such as rehearsal, memorization, or peer collaboration, AI enables learners to access instant information, generate responses, and manage unexpected questions during live interaction. This shift reflects the emergence of what can be conceptualized as a digital coping strategy, where technology functions as an external cognitive partner rather than merely a passive instructional tool. Recent scholarship in AI in education highlights the transformative potential of generative AI in enhancing learning efficiency, metacognitive support, and knowledge construction (Dwivedi et al. 2023; Kasneci et al. 2023; Mahesh Deelip et al. 2016; Portugal-Toro et al. 2025). However, its role as a real-time coping mechanism in L2 oral performance, particularly in managing anxiety and uncertainty, remains insufficiently explored.

A persistent issue in academic presentations is the knowing–doing gap between students' understanding of effective presentation strategies and their actual presentation practices. Many students already know that effective presentations require eye contact, audience engagement, and reduced dependence on written text. However, they still rely heavily on reading directly from slides during presentations. This contrast suggests that presentation performance is shaped not only by knowledge of good presentation practices,

but also by psychological, cognitive, and contextual factors that influence students' ability to apply that knowledge in real-time communication situations.

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the interplay between students' perceptions, psychological barriers, and adaptive strategies in academic presentations within an increasingly technology-mediated environment. Specifically, it seeks to explain why students who demonstrate adequate content understanding continue to show strong dependency on reading slides, and how they regulate presentation challenges through both traditional and digital coping mechanisms.

Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions:

*How do students perceive the distinction between reading and presenting in academic contexts?*

*What psychological factors influence students' reliance on text during presentations?*

*What adaptive strategies, including AI-mediated approaches, do students employ to manage presentation challenges?*

Theoretically, this study contributes to the expansion of Communication Apprehension theory by integrating a digital dimension of coping, positioning AI as part of a broader cognitive–affective regulation system in second language (L2) performance. More importantly, it advances a distributed cognition perspective, in which communicative performance is understood not solely as an individual competence but as a process co-constructed through interaction between human cognition and technological systems (Dwivedi et al. 2023; Kasneci et al. 2023; Portugal-Toro et al. 2025; Sweller 2023).

Practically, the findings are expected to inform pedagogical practices in ELT by emphasizing the need for integrated instructional approaches that address not only presentation skills but also anxiety regulation, cognitive load management, and ethical digital literacy. By understanding how students navigate the tension between reading and presenting, educators can design learning environments that foster more authentic, adaptive, and confident communicative performance in the era of AI-mediated learning.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach using a convergent parallel design, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed concurrently, and subsequently integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' academic presentation practices. This design was selected to enable methodological triangulation, allowing the researcher to compare numerical trends with in-depth qualitative insights and thereby enhance the robustness of the findings.

Within this framework, the quantitative component was used to identify general patterns related to students' presentation behaviors, levels of anxiety, and reliance on textual support. Meanwhile, the qualitative component aimed to explore participants' subjective experiences, underlying motivations, and contextual factors that shape their performance. The integration of both strands facilitated a more nuanced analysis of the interplay between perception, psychological constraints, and adaptive strategies, including emerging technology-mediated behaviors.

### Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted at Universitas Aisyah Pringsewu, involving undergraduate students from various study programs (cross-disciplinary/EFL context) who use English as a foreign language in academic settings. Unlike studies limited to ELT majors, this research captures a broader representation of EFL learners across disciplines, thereby increasing the ecological validity of the findings.

A total of 16 undergraduate students participated in the study. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

*Had completed courses requiring academic presentations*

*Had experience presenting in English*
*Represented different academic disciplines (non-ELT and ELT programs)*
*Were willing to participate in both questionnaire and interview sessions*

All participants were anonymized and coded as P1–P16 to ensure confidentiality and ethical compliance.

**Instruments**

*Structured Questionnaire*

The quantitative instrument consisted of 11 Likert-scale items (1–5) designed to measure key constructs related to academic presentation performance. The questionnaire encompassed the following dimensions:

*Text dependency (e.g., comfort in reading from slides)*
*Self-confidence in oral presentation*
*Preparation strategies (e.g., memorization, rehearsal)*
*Reliance on slides as a primary guide*
*Speaking anxiety and fear of error*
*Comprehension of material*
*Ability to paraphrase and improvise*

The response scale ranged from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

To ensure measurement quality, the instrument underwent content validation through expert review (two ELT lecturers), and demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.78), indicating satisfactory reliability for exploratory research.

*Semi-Structured Interviews*

To complement the quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted using six guiding questions designed to explore:

*Presentation preparation strategies*
*Preference for reading versus explaining*
*Sources of confidence*
*Major challenges during presentation*
*Strategies for handling audience questions*
*Perceptions of the distinction between "reading" and "presenting"*

This instrument enabled the researcher to capture metacognitive awareness, affective responses, and adaptive behaviors, including the emerging use of digital tools such as ChatGPT.

The data collection process in this study was conducted concurrently following the convergent parallel design, allowing quantitative and qualitative data to be gathered during the same phase of participants' experiences. First, participants completed a structured questionnaire individually to obtain baseline information regarding their presentation tendencies and psychological profiles. The questionnaire aimed to measure aspects such as text dependency, anxiety levels, confidence, and improvisation ability during presentations. Collecting quantitative data at the initial stage helped the researcher identify dominant patterns and participants' general characteristics related to presentation performance.

After completing the questionnaire, participants were involved in semi-structured interviews to provide deeper explanations regarding their responses. The interviews enabled participants to clarify their answers, explain contradictions between responses, and describe their personal experiences during presentations. In particular, the interviews explored issues such as high comprehension but low confidence, fear of making mistakes, and the emergence of adaptive strategies, including the use of AI-assisted coping mechanisms. To ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data, all interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

The data analysis process involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviation, and frequency distribution, to identify dominant trends related to anxiety,

confidence, text dependency, and improvisation ability. Meanwhile, qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke (2006), which included data familiarization, coding, theme development, theme refinement, and interpretation. This analysis generated several major themes, such as text dependency as a coping mechanism, psychological barriers, adaptive strategies involving AI mediation, and conceptual understanding of presentation practices. To strengthen analytical rigor and reliability, inter-coder agreement was established through peer review of coding categories.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings through a convergent parallel mixed-methods framework, where quantitative and qualitative data are first analyzed independently and subsequently integrated to generate meta-inferences. The reporting structure follows the methodological sequence: (1) quantitative results, (2) qualitative thematic findings, and (3) integrated interpretation.

**Quantitative Findings: Patterns of Presentation Behavior and Psychological Disposition**

The quantitative analysis provides an overview of students' behavioral tendencies and psychological profiles in academic presentations.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables (n = 16)

| Variable | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Comfort in reading from slides** | 3.44 | 0.72 | Moderately high |
| **Reliance on slides as main guide** | 2.94 | 0.85 | Moderate |
| **Self-confidence** | 3.31 | 1.14 | Moderate |
| **Speaking anxiety** | 2.63 | 1.09 | Moderate |
| **Fear of making errors** | 2.63 | 1.15 | Moderate |
| **Material comprehension** | 3.19 | 0.80 | Moderate |
| **Improvisation ability** | 3.06 | 0.68 | Moderate |

Three critical quantitative patterns emerge:

*The Competence–Performance Tension*

Although students demonstrate moderate material comprehension (M = 3.19, SD = 0.80), their comfort in reading from slides remains comparably high (M = 3.44, SD = 0.72), while improvisation ability falls below both (M = 3.06, SD = 0.68). This subtle yet consistent gap indicates that cognitive readiness, even when present at a moderate-to-adequate level, does not automatically translate into spontaneous communicative performance. The persistence of text dependency alongside moderate comprehension suggests the presence of mediating variables beyond content knowledge alone.

*Affective Dominance in Performance Behavior*

Speaking anxiety (M = 2.63, SD = 1.09) and fear of making errors (M = 2.63, SD = 1.15) are situated at the moderate level, yet their relatively high standard deviations signal notable individual variation, meaning that for a substantial portion of participants, affective pressure is considerably more pronounced than group averages suggest. Combined with only moderate self-confidence (M = 3.31, SD = 1.14), these figures indicate that affective variables function as consistent moderators of presentation behavior, even when they do not dominate at the group level. Importantly, the qualitative data elaborated in the following section reveal that these affective constraints exert a disproportionate influence relative to what the mean scores alone convey.

*Constrained Improvisational Capacity*

The lowest mean score recorded across all variables belongs to improvisation ability (M = 3.06, SD = 0.68), accompanied by the smallest standard deviation in the dataset. This combination, low mean and low variance reflects a broadly shared difficulty among participants in transitioning from structured, text-supported delivery toward spontaneous articulation. Rather than an isolated individual tendency, constrained improvisation appears

to be a collective characteristic of this learner group, reinforcing the structural persistence of scripted presentation behavior.

Taken together, the quantitative data reveal a pattern of moderate but misaligned competencies: students possess sufficient content understanding, yet exhibit a consistent inability to convert that understanding into fluid, text-independent performance. This misalignment cannot be fully accounted for by any single variable whether anxiety, self-efficacy, or comprehension and instead points toward a multi-layered performance mediation problem that necessitates integrative explanation, as pursued through the qualitative findings below.

**Qualitative Findings: Thematic Elaboration of Behavioral and Psychological Mechanisms**

To explain the patterns identified in the quantitative analysis, qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, generating four major themes. All interview excerpts were originally conducted in Indonesian and have been translated into English by the researcher; original Indonesian utterances are retained alongside translations to ensure transparency and interpretive accuracy.

**Theme 1: Text Dependency as a Strategic Coping Mechanism**

Contrary to deficit-based interpretations that frame reading from slides as mere incompetence, participants consistently articulated reading as a deliberate and self-protective strategy. The primary motivation was affective regulation specifically, the management of fear and uncertainty in a high-exposure performance context:

> *"Membaca karena saya tidak percaya diri, takut salah, malu." ["I read because I lack confidence, I am afraid of making mistakes and feel embarrassed."] (P1)*
> *"Membaca, karena terkadang belum terlalu paham." ["I tend to read because sometimes I do not yet fully understand the material."] (P5)*
> *"Membaca karena jika menjelaskan, terbata-bata bicaranya." ["I read because when I try to explain, my speech becomes halting."] (P11)*

Importantly, text dependency was not uniformly rigid. Several participants described a transitional mode of delivery anchoring their speech in the slide text while attempting partial elaboration:

> *"Keduanya, membaca dan menjelaskan agar lebih lancar saat menyampaikan." ["Both reading and explaining, so that the delivery flows more smoothly."] (P6)*
> *"Imbang, saya suka keduanya." ["Balanced, I like doing both."] (P7)*

These responses suggest that text dependency exists on a spectrum rather than as a binary condition. For most participants, reading functions not as an absence of skill but as a performance-regulation strategy, a deliberate mechanism to maintain fluency, minimize error exposure, and sustain a sense of control under communicative pressure.

**Theme 2: Psychological Constraints Beyond Cognitive Readiness**

A recurring pattern across participant responses was the persistence of anxiety and self-doubt even in the presence of adequate content knowledge. This theme directly elaborates the quantitative finding that affective variables operate as consistent moderators regardless of comprehension level.

> *"Lupa materi, atau ketika ditanya langsung gugup." ["I forget the material, or I become nervous the moment I am asked a question directly."] (P3)*
> *"Nervous atau gugup." ["I feel nervous and anxious."] (P13)*
> *"Jika presentasi di depan banyak orang yang tidak dikenal." ["It becomes especially difficult when presenting in front of many unfamiliar people."] (P11)*

Crucially, this anxiety was not limited to students with low content mastery. Participants who reported strong material understanding still experienced significant affective interference:

> *"Karna paham materi dan terbiasa presentasi [namun tantangannya adalah] memahami materi harus paham banget." ["Because I understand the material*

> *and am accustomed to presenting [yet the challenge is that] you really have to understand it deeply."] (P10)*
> *"Kurangnya rasa percaya diri saya saat berbicara atau menjelaskan materi, karena terkadang saya takut kalau materi saya tidak tersampaikan dengan baik." ["My lack of confidence when speaking or explaining material, sometimes I am afraid the content will not come across well."] (P15)*

These responses reveal that psychological constraints operate with considerable independence from cognitive competence. Even when participants possessed an adequate grasp of their material, the anticipatory fear of evaluation, linguistic error, and communicative failure continued to shape their delivery choices. This finding reinforces the limitation of cognition-centered models and underscores the need for affective dimensions to be foregrounded in any explanation of EFL presentation behavior.

**Theme 3: Adaptive Strategies in Managing Performance Breakdown**

When faced with unexpected questions or moments of uncertainty during presentations, participants drew upon a range of coping strategies both conventional and emergent. This theme captures the behavioral repertoire students deploy to stabilize performance when their prepared knowledge proves insufficient.

Traditional strategies included rehearsal, peer collaboration, and improvisation based on general knowledge:

> *"Jika tidak tahu, saya akan jujur dan mencoba mencari jawabannya." ["If I do not know, I will be honest and try to find the answer."] (P6)*
> *"Diskusi dengan teman kelompok." ["I discuss with my group members."] (P11)*
> *"Improvisasi." ["I improvise."] (P10)*

However, a distinctly emergent pattern was identified: the real-time use of AI tools specifically ChatGPT, as an in-the-moment cognitive resource during live presentations:

> *"Kadang membuka PPT ulang, kadang chat GPT." ["Sometimes I reopen the slides, sometimes I use ChatGPT."] (P5)*
> *"Terkadang melihat ulang di slide PPT, kadang searching di AI." ["Sometimes I review the slide, sometimes I search using AI."] (P7)*
> *"Menggunakan AI karena biasanya pertanyaan tersebut sudah di luar topik yang dibahas." ["I use AI because sometimes the questions go beyond the topic being discussed."] (P16)*

The co-occurrence of traditional and digital strategies within the same participants suggests that students do not adopt a single fixed coping mode, but rather navigate a flexible ecology of support resources. Notably, AI is not positioned by participants as a substitute for preparation, but rather as a real-time safety net activated specifically when human knowledge and peer support fall short. This reflects the emergence of what may be termed a digital coping ecology, a distributed system of cognitive support in which human and technological resources are mobilized interchangeably under performance pressure.

**Theme 4: Conceptual Awareness vs. Behavioral Inconsistency**

Despite persistent text dependency in practice, all participants demonstrated a clear metacognitive understanding of the distinction between reading and presenting. This gap between declarative knowledge and enacted behavior constitutes one of the most theoretically significant findings of the study.

> *"Membaca itu hanya dibaca saja, tapi kalau presentasi itu di-improve sendiri sedikit." ["Reading is just reading, but presenting means adding your own elaboration."] (P1)*
> *"Membaca itu membaca keseluruhan teks, sedangkan presentasi itu sudah memahami semua materi." ["Reading means going through the entire text, while presenting means you have already understood all the material."] (P2)*
> *"Jika membaca saat presentasi, seperti tidak memahami materinya, sebaliknya, jika menjelaskan, berarti memahami apa yang dipresentasikan." ["If you read during a presentation, it looks as though you do not*

> *understand the material conversely, if you explain, it means you understand what you are presenting."] (P11)*
> *"Kalau membaca seperti kurang memahami materi, sedangkan jika menjelaskan tanpa membaca PPT berarti sudah sangat memahami materi." ["Reading suggests insufficient understanding, whereas explaining without the slides means you have fully mastered the material."] (P12)*

The consistency of this awareness across all sixteen participants confirms that the knowing–doing gap in this study is not a product of conceptual confusion. Students know what effective presenting looks like; they can articulate its defining characteristics with clarity. Yet their actual behavior under performance conditions systematically contradicts this understanding. This behavioral inconsistency is best understood not as a failure of knowledge, but as the outcome of affective and cognitive pressures that override metacognitive intention in the moment of performance, a dynamic that the integrated findings section elaborates further.

**Integrated Findings (Meta-Inference): Reconstructing the Performance System**

The convergent integration of quantitative and qualitative data across this study's two strands yields a set of meta-inferences that move decisively beyond what either dataset could produce in isolation. Rather than generating a simple additive picture, the integration reveals a fundamentally interdependent performance system, in which cognitive, affective, and technological dimensions interact in ways that neither statistical patterns nor narrative accounts alone are capable of fully capturing. Three synthesized insights emerge from this process.

*Reframing Text Dependency: From Deficit to Adaptive Strategy*

Quantitative data establish that participants' comfort in reading from slides (M = 3.44, SD = 0.72) remains meaningfully elevated relative to both their improvisation ability (M = 3.06, SD = 0.68) and their slide reliance as a guide (M = 2.94, SD = 0.85). This pattern, in which reading comfort consistently outpaces spontaneous performance capacity, suggests that text dependency is not incidental but structurally embedded in students' presentation behavior. Crucially, however, the qualitative data reframe the meaning of this pattern: participants did not describe reading as an absence of skill, but rather as a deliberate, self-regulating choice. As P1 articulated, "*Membaca karena saya tidak percaya diri, takut salah, malu*" ["I read because I lack confidence, I am afraid of making mistakes and feel embarrassed"], while P11 stated, "*Membaca karena jika menjelaskan, terbata-bata bicaranya*" ["I read because when I try to explain, my speech becomes halting"]. These accounts, when read alongside the quantitative finding that slide reliance is comparatively lower than reading comfort itself, suggest that students deploy reading strategically to maintain surface-level fluency rather than to compensate for a fundamental lack of preparation.

The integration thus produces a meta-inference that neither dataset alone supports: text dependency in this context is best understood not as a performance deficiency but as a performance-stabilization strategy an adaptive response to the convergence of linguistic vulnerability and affective exposure in real-time academic speech.

*The Affective–Cognitive Disjunction*

A second critical meta-inference concerns the relationship between content competence and affective interference. Quantitatively, participants demonstrate moderate material comprehension (M = 3.19, SD = 0.80) alongside moderate speaking anxiety (M = 2.63, SD = 1.09) and fear of errors (M = 2.63, SD = 1.15). Taken at face value, these moderate mean scores might suggest that neither competence nor anxiety exerts a decisive influence over performance. However, the relatively high standard deviations for both affective variables indicate substantial within-group variation, meaning that for a considerable portion of participants, anxiety operates at levels far above the group mean. This distributional skew is precisely what the qualitative data illuminate. Even participants who reported strong material comprehension, such as P10, who stated, "*Karna paham materi dan terbiasa presentasi*" ["Because I understand the material and am accustomed to presenting"]

identified the depth of that understanding as itself a source of pressure: "*Memahami materi harus paham banget*" ["You really have to understand it deeply"]. Similarly, P15 articulated persistent self-doubt despite reported preparation: "*Kurangnya rasa percaya diri saya saat berbicara atau menjelaskan materi, karena terkadang saya takut kalau materi saya tidak tersampaikan dengan baik*" ["My lack of confidence when speaking or explaining material sometimes I am afraid the content will not come across well"].

The meta-inference produced by this integration is that the affective–cognitive relationship in EFL presentation is not linear or compensatory. Moderate cognitive readiness does not buffer against affective interference; rather, affective constraints appear to operate with relative independence from comprehension level, functioning as an autonomous moderator of performance behavior. This disjunction challenges models that predict improved performance as a straightforward outcome of increasing content mastery.

*Emergence of AI as a Cognitive Extension Mechanism*

The third and most novel meta-inference concerns the emergence of AI-mediated coping as a functionally distinct category of performance regulation. The quantitative instruments in this study were not designed to capture digital coping behavior, and accordingly, this dimension yields no quantitative signal, a finding that is itself methodologically significant, as it reveals a structural limitation of closed-response instruments in capturing emergent adaptive behaviors. The qualitative data, by contrast, document this behavior explicitly. Participants reported turning to AI tools, particularly ChatGPT, when real-time demands exceeded the limits of prepared knowledge:

> *"Kadang membuka PPT ulang, kadang chat GPT" (P5) ["Sometimes I reopen the slides, sometimes I use ChatGPT"], and "Menggunakan AI karena biasanya pertanyaan tersebut sudah di luar topik yang dibahas" (P16) ["I use AI because sometimes the questions go beyond the topic being discussed"]. Critically, AI use was not reported as a substitute for preparation but as a contingency resource activated specifically under conditions of performance breakdown, a pattern that distinguishes it structurally from both rehearsal-based preparation and slide-reliance.*

The meta-inference here extends beyond mere documentation of a behavior: it signals the formation of what may be termed a *distributed coping ecology* in EFL presentation contexts, wherein human cognition, peer resources, textual supports, and AI tools are mobilized interchangeably in response to the variable demands of live performance. This distributed system cannot be captured by any single-variable model, nor is it adequately addressed by existing frameworks that conceptualize coping strategies as exclusively individual and cognitively internal. The co-presence of traditional and AI-mediated strategies within the same participants suggests a fluid, situationally responsive ecology of support rather than a stable hierarchy of preferences.

**Empirically Grounded Research Gap (Key Contribution of Findings)**

The integrated findings of this study do not merely confirm existing theoretical propositions; they expose specific, empirically grounded gaps in the current literature on EFL academic presentations. Three gaps are identified, each deriving directly from the data rather than from abstract theoretical positioning alone.

**Gap 1: The Fragmentation of Explanatory Variables in Existing Models**

Existing research on EFL presentation behavior has tended to examine anxiety, cognitive load, and self-efficacy as separate, sequentially studied constructs (C.-H. Chen et al. 2022; Shang and Ma 2024; Wu 2019). The present data, however, demonstrate that these variables do not operate independently: the disjunction between moderate comprehension and persisting text dependency cannot be attributed to any single factor, nor does the interaction of anxiety and self-confidence follow a simple compensatory logic. Rather, the data reveal a multi-factor mediation system in which affective constraints can override cognitive readiness even at moderate levels of both. No existing single-variable model is equipped to account for this interaction, and the field lacks integrative empirical frameworks

capable of modeling the simultaneous, dynamic co-influence of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of presentation performance.

**Gap 2: The Underspecified Mechanisms of the Knowing–Doing Gap**

While the knowing–doing gap has been acknowledged as a theoretical concept in higher education research (Phillips and Condy 2023; Rycroft-Smith 2022), the present study demonstrates that this gap has not been adequately unpacked in EFL presentation contexts at the empirical level. All sixteen participants in this study articulated a clear and consistent conceptual distinction between reading and presenting: they understood that authentic presentation requires elaboration, paraphrasing, and audience engagement rather than textual recitation. Yet their behavioral data both quantitative and qualitative, document a persistent reliance on text. This evidence confirms that the knowing–doing gap in this context is not a product of definitional confusion or insufficient declarative knowledge, but rather emerges from the convergent pressure of affective interference, constrained working memory under real-time L2 production demands, and the strategic logic of risk minimization. The mechanisms that produce this gap therefore require empirical specification at the level of process rather than merely the level of outcome and a level of analysis that the current literature has not systematically pursued.

**Gap 3: The Absence of AI-Mediated Coping in EFL Performance Models**

The most significant empirical gap revealed by this study is the near-total absence of AI-mediated coping as a theorized or empirically studied category within existing ELT performance research. Current frameworks for understanding presentation coping strategies draw predominantly on traditional categories: rehearsal, memorization, anxiety management techniques, and peer collaboration (I.-J. Chen et al. 2022; Portugal-Toro et al. 2025; Shang and Ma 2024). The data from this study, however, document a qualitatively different category of coping, one in which students actively recruit external AI systems as real-time cognitive partners during live presentations. This behavior does not fit existing typologies of either preparation strategies or performance-regulation strategies, as it operates specifically in the moment of performance breakdown and targets knowledge gaps that emerge unpredictably during audience interaction. The absence of this category from existing models constitutes an empirical blind spot with substantive theoretical implications: if students are routinely distributing cognitive and communicative labor across human and AI systems during academic presentations, then models of L2 oral performance that locate all competence within the individual learner are no longer empirically adequate. This gap calls for the development of new theoretical vocabulary and new methodological approaches capable of capturing distributed performance behavior in AI-mediated learning environments.

**Emerging Pedagogical Directions from the Data**

The integrated findings suggest several data-driven pedagogical directions grounded in students' lived performance experiences. These do not yet constitute a formal model but reflect patterned responses to the cognitive and affective demands of academic presentations. First, text dependency should be repositioned as a functional starting point rather than a deficit. The data indicate that reading supports fluency and anxiety management, suggesting that instruction should focus on gradually transforming, rather than abruptly eliminating, reliance on text. Second, affective constraints must be addressed as a core component of pedagogy. The persistence of anxiety despite adequate comprehension demonstrates that cognitive preparation alone is insufficient, highlighting the need for low-risk speaking environments and parallel development of emotional regulation. Third, the findings reveal an expanding repertoire of coping strategies, including the emerging use of AI as a situational support tool during performance breakdown. This indicates that students operate within a flexible ecology of resources, combining human and technological support in real time. Taken together, these directions point to the need for a more integrated approach to presentation pedagogy, one that accounts for the dynamic

interaction between cognitive load, affective pressure, and adaptive strategy use, as elaborated in the following discussion.

**Discussion**

This study set out to examine the interplay between students' perceptions, psychological constraints, and adaptive strategies in academic presentations within an EFL context. By integrating quantitative and qualitative findings, the study advances a multi-layered, empirically grounded explanation of presentation behavior that moves decisively beyond single-variable accounts. The discussion elaborates four key theoretical contributions derived from the data, while maintaining fidelity to the moderate and distributional character of the findings rather than overstating their magnitude.

**Reframing Text Dependency: From Deficit to Adaptive Cognitive Strategy**

One of the most significant findings of this study is that students' reliance on reading from slides should not be interpreted primarily as a deficiency in presentation skills, but rather as a strategic response to the convergence of cognitive and affective pressures. Quantitative data showed that reading comfort (M = 3.44) consistently exceeded improvisation ability (M = 3.06), while slide reliance as a primary guide remained at a moderate level (M = 2.94), a pattern suggesting that reading is not simply a default behavior but a positively selected mode of delivery. Qualitative evidence reinforced this interpretation: students deliberately use reading to maintain fluency, minimize error exposure, and preserve a sense of control under the demands of live L2 performance.

This finding aligns with Cognitive Load Theory, which posits that complex tasks such as real-time second language speech production impose substantial demands on working memory, often exceeding available processing capacity (Sweller 2023; Zhang and Zhang 2022) Under such conditions, learners engage in cognitive offloading externalizing information onto environmental supports to reduce intrinsic cognitive demand. The present study extends this theoretical account by demonstrating that cognitive offloading in presentation contexts operates not only as a memory-management strategy but as a broader performance-regulation mechanism, encompassing affective risk management alongside working memory support. This supports recent arguments that external artifacts such as slides function as components of an extended cognitive system rather than as passive informational aids (Phillips and Condy 2023; Portugal-Toro et al. 2025; Rycroft-Smith 2022). Text dependency, understood within this framework, represents not an undesirable behavior to be corrected but a situated adaptive strategy to be scaffolded.

**The Affective–Cognitive Disjunction: Revisiting Anxiety and Self-Efficacy in L2 Performance**

A second critical contribution of this study concerns the relationship between cognitive competence and affective readiness. The quantitative data present a deceptively moderate picture: material comprehension at M = 3.19, speaking anxiety at M = 2.63, and self-confidence at M = 3.31. A straightforward reading of these means might suggest a reasonably balanced profile. However, the high standard deviations for anxiety (SD = 1.09), fear of error (SD = 1.15), and self-confidence (SD = 1.14) indicate that these variables are among the most differentiated in the dataset meaning that a substantial subgroup of participants experiences affective pressures far exceeding the group average. The qualitative data make this distributional heterogeneity concrete: participants who reported adequate or even strong content understanding continued to experience significant affective interference, describing fear of evaluation, anticipatory embarrassment, and uncertainty about communicative adequacy as persistent influences on their delivery choices.

This pattern reinforces and extends research on Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA), which identifies fear of negative evaluation, linguistic insecurity, and public exposure as core inhibitors of oral performance (Alnahidh and Altalhab 2020; C.-H. Chen et al. 2022). However, the present study moves beyond treating anxiety as a unidirectional inhibitory force. The data reveal that affective constraints actively *reconfigure* performance strategies, not merely suppressing performance but redirecting it toward more controlled,

risk-minimizing modes of delivery. This is not a quantitative reduction in output but a qualitative shift in the *type* of output produced.

Furthermore, the findings complicate conventional interpretations of self-efficacy theory. Prior research has generally positioned self-efficacy as a positive predictor of communicative performance (Donate 2022; Shang and Ma 2024), yet the present data show that participants with moderate to adequate content mastery and moderate self-confidence nevertheless maintained substantial text dependency. This suggests that self-efficacy does not function as a direct determinant of performance behavior but rather as a variable that interacts dynamically with anxiety and real-time cognitive demands. Its influence is mediated, not direct, and its predictive value diminishes under conditions of concurrent affective and cognitive pressure a qualification that has significant implications for how self-efficacy-based interventions are designed and evaluated in EFL presentation contexts.

**AI as Digital Coping: Extending Communication Apprehension into a Distributed Cognition Framework**

The most novel theoretical contribution of this study is the identification of AI-assisted coping as a functionally distinct and empirically documented category of performance regulation in EFL presentation contexts. Participants reported using AI tools specifically ChatGPT to manage unexpected questions, verify information, and stabilize performance at moments when their prepared knowledge proved insufficient. This behavior was described not as a form of cheating or avoidance, but as a pragmatic, situationally responsive resource activated under conditions of real-time knowledge limitation.

This finding extends Communication Apprehension theory, which has traditionally conceptualized coping strategies in terms of avoidance behaviors, cognitive restructuring, or preparatory rehearsal (Amri 2020; Liu and Jackson 2009; Shang and Ma 2024; Teng 2024; Wu 2019). The introduction of AI as a real-time performance resource constitutes a qualitatively new category *technology-mediated coping* that current frameworks are not equipped to accommodate. Theoretically, this behavior is best situated within a distributed cognition framework, which understands cognition as distributed across individuals, tools, and environments rather than localized within the individual mind (Dwivedi et al. 2023; Kasneci et al. 2023). Within this framework, AI functions as a cognitive extension that augments learners' capacity to access and deploy knowledge under the time pressure and evaluative exposure of live academic interaction.

This development raises important tensions that warrant careful pedagogical and ethical attention. While AI use enhances performance stability in the short term, it may simultaneously reduce opportunities for spontaneous language production, foster ongoing dependency on external knowledge systems, and blur the evaluative boundary between individual competence and technologically assisted performance. These tensions are not resolvable through simple prohibition; they require thoughtful integration into presentation pedagogy as a domain of digital literacy development. The key implication is not that AI should be excluded from presentation contexts, but that its use should be framed, scaffolded, and discussed explicitly as part of broader preparation and communication development.

**The Knowing–Doing Gap as a Multidimensional Performance System**

The most integrative finding of this study is the robust empirical confirmation of the knowing–doing gap, combined with a substantive account of its underlying mechanisms. All sixteen participants demonstrated clear metacognitive awareness of the distinction between reading and presenting: they could articulate that authentic presentation requires audience engagement, paraphrasing, and elaboration beyond slide text. Yet their behavioral data quantitative and qualitative document a systematic reliance on precisely the scripted, text-anchored delivery they themselves identified as inadequate. The gap, in this study, is unambiguous and universal across the participant group.

Prior literature has acknowledged the knowing–doing gap as a conceptual concern (Phillips and Condy 2023; Rycroft-Smith 2022) but has rarely subjected it to integrative empirical analysis in EFL presentation contexts. The present study advances this concept by

demonstrating that the gap is not simply the product of insufficient practice or motivational deficit. Rather, it emerges from the interaction of three mutually reinforcing systems: (1) cognitive constraints arising from the processing demands of real-time L2 production, which limit the capacity for simultaneous content retrieval, language formulation, and audience monitoring; (2) affective constraints arising from anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and anticipatory self-doubt, which persist independently of comprehension level and redirect behavior toward lower-risk performance modes; and (3) adaptive strategies, including both text dependency and AI-mediated coping, which stabilize performance by distributing cognitive and communicative labor across human and technological resources.

Taken together, these three systems constitute what this study proposes as a *multidimensional performance regulation system*, in which students strategically balance risk minimization, communicative control, and content delivery under conditions of sustained performance pressure. This reconceptualization shifts the understanding of the knowing–doing gap from an individual-level deficiency to a systemic phenomenon shaped by contextual, psychological, and technological factors simultaneously and thereby calls for systemic, rather than purely skill-focused, pedagogical responses.

**The PACE Framework: A Multidimensional Model of EFL Presentation Performance Regulation**

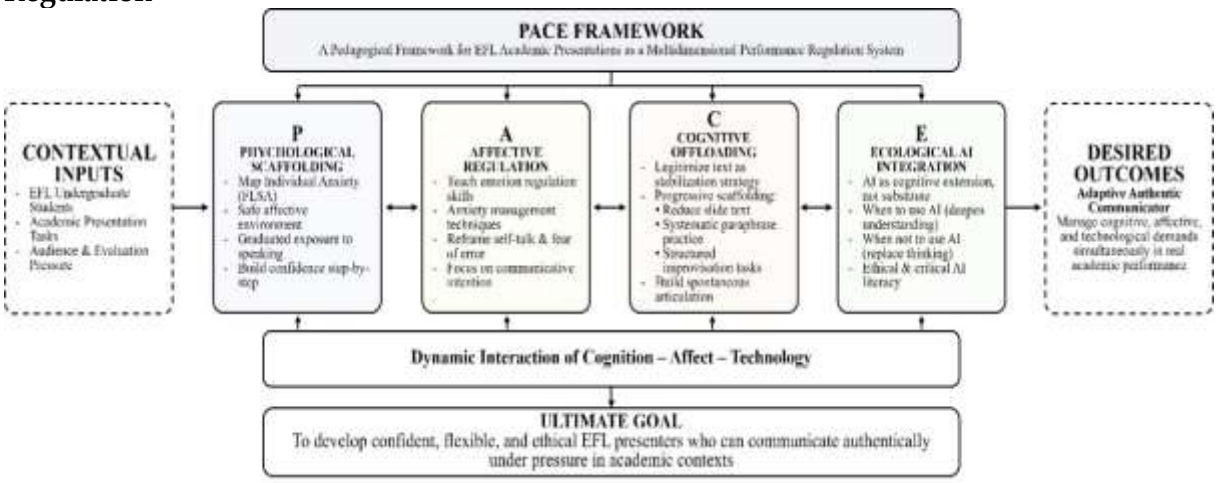


Figure 1. PACE Framework: A Pedagogical Framework for EFL Academic Presentations as a Multidimensional Performance Regulation System

Building on the integrated findings of this study, the data collectively point to a critical limitation in existing models of EFL academic presentation: the tendency to treat cognitive competence, affective factors, and performance strategies as separable domains. In contrast, the present findings demonstrate that students' presentation behavior emerges from the dynamic interaction of psychological, cognitive, and technological dimensions, which cannot be adequately explained through single-variable frameworks.

To address this gap, this study proposes the PACE Framework (Psychological–Affective–Cognitive–Ecological AI) as an integrated pedagogical model that reconceptualizes EFL academic presentation as a multidimensional performance regulation system rather than a discrete speaking skill.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the framework begins with contextual inputs, including EFL learners, academic presentation demands, and evaluative pressure. These contextual conditions generate a performance environment characterized by high cognitive load and affective exposure, which in turn activates four interdependent regulatory dimensions.

*Psychological Scaffolding (P)*

The first pillar positions learners' psychological profiles, particularly Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA), as the foundational entry point for pedagogy. Rather than enforcing immediate text-independent performance, the framework emphasizes diagnostic mapping of individual anxiety levels and the creation of affectively safe learning environments. Gradual exposure to speaking tasks and step-by-step confidence building are

central mechanisms. This dimension reflects the empirical finding that students' reliance on text is strongly linked to self-protection against perceived communicative risk.

*Affective Regulation (A)*

The second pillar addresses the study's key insight that anxiety operates independently of content mastery. Consequently, emotional regulation is treated not as a byproduct of improved competence but as a distinct skill domain. Instruction within this dimension includes anxiety management techniques, reframing of self-perception, and a shift in focus from linguistic accuracy to communicative intention. This directly responds to the identified affective–cognitive disjunction, where students with adequate understanding still experience performance breakdown due to emotional interference.

*Cognitive Offloading (C)*

The third pillar reconceptualizes text dependency as a legitimate and adaptive strategy within high-demand performance contexts. Drawing on Cognitive Load Theory, the framework positions slides and textual support as part of an extended cognitive system that enables learners to manage working memory constraints. Pedagogically, this dimension advocates for progressive scaffolding, including gradual reduction of slide text, structured paraphrasing practice, and guided improvisation tasks. The goal is not to eliminate support abruptly, but to transition learners toward spontaneous articulation in a controlled and sustainable manner.

*Ecological AI Integration (E)*

The fourth and most novel pillar incorporates the emergence of AI-mediated coping observed in the data. AI tools are conceptualized as cognitive extensions within a distributed performance system, rather than as external aids or sources of academic misconduct. This dimension introduces ethical and strategic AI literacy, guiding learners in distinguishing between productive AI use (e.g., enhancing understanding) and substitutive use (e.g., replacing thinking processes). By situating AI within an ecological framework, the model acknowledges the evolving reality of human–technology collaboration in academic communication.

*Dynamic Interaction: Cognition – Affect – Technology*

Crucially, the four pillars do not operate linearly. Instead, they interact continuously within a dynamic system of performance regulation, where cognitive load, emotional state, and technological mediation influence one another in real time. This interaction explains why improvements in one domain (e.g., content mastery) do not automatically translate into improved performance, as other dimensions may simultaneously constrain or redirect behavior.

*Outcome: Adaptive Authentic Communicator*

The integrated operation of the PACE dimensions leads to the development of what this study defines as an adaptive authentic communicator, a learner capable of managing cognitive demands, regulating affective pressure, and navigating technological resources simultaneously in real-time academic contexts. This outcome moves beyond traditional notions of fluency or accuracy, emphasizing flexibility, self-regulation, and ethical awareness as core competencies.

*Ultimate Goal*

At its highest level, the PACE Framework aims to develop EFL learners who can communicate authentically under pressure while maintaining cognitive control, emotional stability, and responsible engagement with digital tools. In doing so, the framework shifts the pedagogical focus from performance as reproduction of knowledge to performance as situated, adaptive regulation within a complex communicative ecology.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to explain why EFL students who understand effective presentation principles continue to rely on text-dependent delivery and how they regulate performance under academic pressure. The findings reveal that text dependency is not merely a sign of

limited competence but functions as a strategy to maintain fluency, reduce cognitive overload, and manage anxiety during live presentations. The study also identifies an affective–cognitive disjunction in which anxiety may disrupt performance even when students possess adequate knowledge and preparation. In addition, the findings highlight the emergence of AI-mediated coping practices, where students use generative AI tools as external cognitive support during presentations. This indicates a shift toward technology-assisted academic performance and distributed cognition in language learning. Based on these findings, the study proposes the PACE Framework (Psychological–Affective–Cognitive–Ecological AI) to explain the interaction among emotional regulation, cognitive support, psychological readiness, and technological mediation. Pedagogically, the study emphasizes the importance of integrating cognitive, emotional, and technological dimensions in presentation instruction. Future research should examine the long-term effects of AI-assisted coping on presentation competence, learner autonomy, and critical thinking development.

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