

Facing the Fear: Understanding and Overcoming Anxiety as a New Interpreter

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the physical emotions and reactions I experienced during different stages of interpreting: before, during, and after assignments. These assignments took place in community college classes, where I worked with a variety of teams and encountered a range of courses. The goal was to track how emotions, particularly nervousness and anxiety, changed throughout the interpreting process and how they impacted performance. To gather data, I used a Likert scale before assignments to measure levels of nervousness and included written reflections to provide additional context and identify patterns. A mixed methods approach was used, combining quantitative and qualitative data to examine trends in anxiety and how they related to different interpreting situations. The findings suggest that new assignments and unexpected changes often led to increased fear and anxiety, at times resulting in hesitation to interpret or even declining assignments. This research highlights an often overlooked aspect of interpreting: the emotional experience. While interpreter education programs emphasize message production and ethics, they may not fully prepare interpreters for the emotional and physical demands of the work. These findings suggest that addressing performance anxiety and stress should play a greater role in interpreter education. Ultimately, this study emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and emotional regulation in supporting confidence and overall well-being in the profession.

Keywords: novice interpreters; interpreting anxiety; reflective practice; experiential learning; confidence development; professional identity

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Interpreting is a dynamic profession that requires not only technical skill but also the ability to respond quickly to unexpected situations. For newcomers entering the field, the combination of performance demands, unfamiliar environments, and professional expectations can create significant emotional and cognitive challenges. Understanding how fear, anxiety, and self-doubt emerge during interpreting assignments is critical for developing strategies that support professional growth and effectiveness. This study focuses on examining these experiences from a first-person perspective, exploring how a novice interpreter navigates the complex intersection of personal readiness, situational demands, and professional expectations.

Background

Interpreting is a profession that has many obstacles, challenges, and arising demands that may happen at any moment. Some of these sudden changes may include an assignment suddenly becoming emotional, a speaker going off topic, having difficulty with audio, or even captions on a video not working. As a newcomer to the professional field, that has terrified me. Growing up, I was always the type A personality where I valued and prioritized structure and organization. If I was not proficient at something or had not had prior knowledge or experience of it, I did not want to participate or try it out. That has since gone down in severity as I have grown and pushed through.

Statement of the Problem

As I entered the American Sign Language (ASL)/English interpreting field, I noticed that as an intern, I felt extreme, debilitating fear during my observations when a team interpreter

would ask if I wanted to get up on the stand and try it out. There were many factors and fears that I thought about when asked about this. Some of these being up in front of the class compared to my training; where I was only interpreting in my room in front of my computer, not having interpreted/signed for a few months, as well as being put on the spot. A noticeable performance anxiety was taking place without knowing what it was or why it was happening. The encouragement to get up was not when I had felt comfortable enough, adding to the feeling of loss of control. I knew I was there to interpret, and that was the premise of the job, but the initial fear was so debilitating that I did not get up for a turn for a few days to even weeks.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to investigate the thought processes happening in an assignment that may cause fear and anxiety within the interpreting profession. In this study, I will note if there are any patterns within the emotional and physical responses that may hinder my ability and level of efficiency when interpreting, as well as any controls taken that may have improved the process of my interpreting and message production. The main questions for this study are what are the levels of anxiety that arise during assignments and how my process hindered or affected me during the interpreting profession as a newcomer to the field?

Theoretical Framework

This action research project was framed through reflective practice and experiential learning (Schön, 1983; Kolb, 1984), which emphasized how professional growth develops through experience and reflection. Reflective practice encourages practitioners to examine their actions, thoughts, and emotional responses to better understand their development and decision

making. In interpreting, reflection has been identified as a key tool for fostering professional identity, self-awareness, and confidence (Williams, 2020).

Novice interpreters often encountered uncertainty, anxiety, and self-doubt when applying skills in real-world settings. Prior research suggested that reflecting on these experiences supported growth by helping interpreters recognize patterns in their responses and identify areas for improvement (Steinmetz, 2022). Similarly, autoethnographic action research by novice interpreters highlighted the value of examining personal experiences to understand emotional and professional challenges in practice (Wong, 2023).

In this study, I examined my emotional and physical responses before, during, and after interpreting assignments to understand how these reactions influenced performance. Reflecting on these experiences over time allowed me to identify trends in anxiety and recognize how increased exposure to assignments contributed to greater confidence and professional development. This framework positioned my experiences as part of an ongoing learning process within the interpreting profession.

Organization

This study is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study, including the background, statement of the problem, purpose, theoretical framework, limitations, and definitions of key terms. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature related to interpreting anxiety, confidence development, and the experiences of novice interpreters. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the study, describing the research design, participant role, data collection, and data analysis procedures used in this action research project. Chapter 4 presents the results by identifying patterns observed in emotional, cognitive, and physical responses during

interpreting assignments. Chapter 5 discusses the findings and interprets their meaning within the context of the profession and the theoretical framework. Finally, Chapter 6 synthesizes the overall study, reflecting on the significance of the findings and considering implications for practice and future inquiry.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation was that I served as both the researcher and the sole participant, which introduced the possibility of personal and unconscious bias. Because the data relied on self-reflection, Likert-scale ratings, and journal entries, interpretations were shaped by my perceptions, emotional responses, and lived experience. Although self-reflection was intentionally incorporated throughout the process, complete neutrality was not attainable within a personal reflective design. Additionally, the research pool was limited to a single novice interpreter's experiences. While this allowed for in-depth exploration of patterns related to anxiety, confidence, and identity development, it restricted the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, the study should be understood as exploratory and illustrative rather than broadly representative of all novice interpreters.

Definition of Terms

Core Research Terms

Reflective Practice- Reflective practice is the intentional process of examining one's experiences, thoughts, and actions in order to gain insight and improve future professional practice.

Experiential Learning- Experiential learning is a process in which individuals develop knowledge and skills through direct experience followed by reflection on those experiences.

Psychological/Experiential Terms

Performance Anxiety (in this study)- The physiological and cognitive stress response experienced before or during interpreting tasks when perceived expectations exceed perceived readiness.

Self-Doubt- Internal questioning of one's interpreting competence that interferes with decision-making or participation.

Readiness- The interpreter's perceived preparedness, cognitively, emotionally, and linguistically, to participate in an interpreting task.

Control (Perceived Control)- The interpreter's sense of capacity or ability to anticipate and manage demands within an assignment.

Summary

In this chapter, the context for my study was introduced by describing my experiences as a novice interpreter and the performance anxiety that emerged during real-world assignments. I identified the problem as recurring fear and self-doubt that influenced my participation and interpreting effectiveness, leading to the purpose of examining my emotional, cognitive, and physical responses while interpreting. Using the frameworks of reflective practice and experiential learning, these experiences were understood as part of an ongoing process of professional growth, in which reflection on assignments and repeated exposure supported skill development, confidence, and self-awareness rather than framing challenges solely as personal shortcomings. The next chapter reviews relevant literature that informed my understanding of interpreting anxiety, confidence development, and the experiences of newcomers in the profession.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Coming into the field of interpreting as a newly-graduated professional presents many emotions such as excitement, fear, vulnerability, and uncertainty. For many of the entry-level interpreters, the transition from student to a working interpreter is challenging. At the same time, novice interpreters often faced performance anxiety and low self-confidence while trying to establish a professional identity (Ferdowsi and Razmi, 2024). These emotional and cognitive challenges were common and could impact how interpreters worked, engaged in teams, and interacted with mentors (Wong, 2023).

This literature review discusses the experiences of novice interpreters with a focus on fear, anxieties within the job, and developing confidence during the early points in an interpreter's professional career. For newer interpreters who are preparing to enter the field, one factor that is often left out of the literature is what solutions are successful in lowering the amount of anxiety and fear experienced while working. This literature review examines previous research related to navigating entry into the interpreting field, the range of emotions experienced by entry-level interpreters, and the development of confidence during the early stages of professional practice.

Entering as an Entry Level Interpreter

Initial research has shown that novice interpreters often experience fear, self-doubt, and anxiety when first entering the field (Ferdowsi and Razmi, 2024). The overarching theme identified in these studies was performance anxiety, particularly among entry-level interpreters. This anxiety frequently contributed to a lack of confidence, which in turn could hinder one's

ability to interpret effectively. Steinmetz (2022) similarly found that fear and low confidence could prevent novice interpreters from performing at their best. Confidence is widely recognized as a core component of effective performance, as “confidence is not only a trait that is essential to embody in one's personal life, but it is the main factor of performance” (Steinmetz, 2022, p. 1).

Chiang (2010) highlighted the prevalence of anxiety among novice interpreters and explained how this anxiety could contribute to fear in professional settings. The study identified “specific stressors, including difficult source texts and fear of public speaking, as common triggers for performance anxiety” (Chiang, 2010, para. 3). Chiang drew on studies of spoken-language and second-language interpreting, which demonstrated that anxiety can negatively affect comprehension, memory, and accuracy during interpretation. These findings suggest that novice interpreters frequently experience emotional and cognitive challenges when beginning professional work.

Some research suggests that completing interpreter training may not fully prepare novice interpreters for the demands of professional practice. Studies have shown that real-world assignments often present challenges, such as managing team dynamics, adapting to unfamiliar subjects, and handling unexpected changes, that are difficult to replicate in educational settings (Chiang, 2010; Ferdowsi and Razmi, 2024; Wong, 2023). While training provided foundational skills, novice interpreters still experienced anxiety and self-doubt when transitioning to authentic professional contexts (Steinmetz, 2022). These findings highlight a gap between education and practice.

Rose (2023) reflected similar experiences, noting that “the fear of transitioning to a completely different field while managing my professional commitments held me back” (Rose, 2023, para. 3). Rose also delayed their education due to these fears, illustrating how anxiety can influence professional decision-making and confidence for novice interpreters. Some of the questions that Rose pondered included:

What steps can I take today and every day going forward to ease my transition fears?

This might involve establishing a reliable support system to rely on, securing sufficient funds to weather any lean periods, and connecting with peers undergoing a similar journey. Having a shared experience can make navigating the common challenges smoother. (Rose, 2023, para. 7)

Research by Lopez (2022) examined entry-level interpreters and highlighted how professional identity develops through interactions with mentors and team environments. Mentorship provided guidance, modeling, and feedback, while team collaborations required interpreters to negotiate responsibilities, communicate effectively, and support one another. Lopez emphasized that these social and team-based experiences differ from individualized coaching or classroom learning, and they play a critical role in shaping confidence and professional purpose. These interactions helped novice interpreters understand their roles within professional settings and build confidence, which is a key component of professional identity.

Similarly, other scholars have examined collaboration and teaming within professional interpreting. Teaming practices in professional interpreting vary across settings, assignments, and team compositions, yet collaboration is increasingly considered a standard expectation (Bee, 2021, para. 2). Novice interpreters often had to navigate these collaborative environments

without explicit guidance, determining their preferred communication and decision-making styles independently. Research suggests that these conditions can contribute to stress and anxiety, as interpreters balance complex performance demands while developing their professional identity (Dean & Pollard, 2013).

While formal education provided foundational skills, novice interpreters often did not have opportunities to practice authentic teaming or mentorship in educational programs. Literature indicated that real-world collaborative experiences, including shared decision-making, feedback, and support strategies, were critical for developing confidence, professional competence, and identity (Lopez, 2022). These findings highlight the gap between classroom preparation and professional practice, and the potential emotional challenges faced by new interpreters when entering team-based assignments.

Noda (2023) explains the path about entering the field as a novice interpreter. Reflective practice was investigated by recording their own work and noticing specific areas they could work and improve on. This method allowed them to focus not on a bigger, broad list of demands and fears but rather one at a time to improve at a gradual rate. She noted that a barrier affecting their work was their confidence. The article emphasized the importance of connecting to the interpreting process, highlighting strategies that support novice interpreters in navigating real-world assignments and developing professional competence. It took trial and error to do meaning transfer but “seeing improvement increased motivation to keep going” (Noda, 2023, p. 32).

Sherp (2024) discussed factors that support the development of professional identity in interpreting, including self-trust, mentorship, impact, and personal belief systems. These

elements highlight the ways novice interpreters can build confidence and resilience while establishing their professional roles. By emphasizing the importance of guidance and reflective practice, Sherp's insights reinforce an underlying purpose of developing a professional identity: understanding one's role, values, and motivations in the field and finding supportive relationships that foster growth.

Factors of Fear/Anxiety While Interpreting

Ferdowsi and Razmi (2024) explain and introduce the different factors that may cause anxiety. Drawing from earlier studies, they reference anxiety associated with "performing in a public setting" (Munro, 2008, p. 196) as well as "communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety" (Horwitz et al., para 2, 1986). These foundational concepts help frame how anxiety can emerge in performance-based and evaluative contexts such as interpreting.

...these factors were categorized into six groups, i.e., individual, input (language-related factors, speaker-related factors), note-taking (inappropriate note-taking skill, lack of creativity in taking notes), environmental (noise and distraction, peer-related factors), output (meaning transfer, delivery), and teacher-related (testing teachers' behavior).

(Ferdowsi and Razmi, 2024, para. 1)

This categorization shows how anxiety can develop from multiple sources within the interpreting process. It demonstrates that the act of "performing" for others, while simultaneously processing input, managing delivery, and navigating environmental and evaluative pressures, can intensify feelings of fear and anxiety for the interpreter (Ferdowsi and Razmi, 2024).

Cabrera (2023) explored how negative self-talk influences the performance and emotional experiences of novice interpreters. Their research aimed to identify triggers that elicited anxiety and low confidence during interpreting assignments. Findings indicated that internal dialogue, including fears of judgment and self-doubt, can inhibit performance and contribute to heightened stress in entry-level interpreters. Understanding these dynamics helps contextualize the challenges faced by novice interpreters when managing performance anxiety in real-world settings.

Self-talk, the internal dialogue a person has with themselves that influences their beliefs and emotions, is a big factor in many people's lives and can bleed into any aspect of life. Self-talk may make a bigger impact on people's psyche than they realize. Kim et al. (2021) finds the point that self-talk does have an impact on our cognitive performance. There can be both a positive and negative effect for either form of self-talk. Interpreters may use self-talk before, during, and/or after an assignment to regulate or process through any situation or emotion that may be happening. While it may be uplifting, newer interpreters who may already have doubts on their work and professional worth may go the negative route resulting in "reverse reflection of confidence, stimulating efforts to avoid a negative outcome, and viewing negative self-talk as a challenge" (Kim et al., para. 1, 2021).

Marschark et al. (2005) reported that educational interpreters often experienced both identity development and fear within post-secondary settings, as they navigated their professional roles in relation to themselves and their interpreting work. Novice interpreters frequently encountered challenges in establishing professional credibility while managing performance anxiety and self-doubt. Marschark et al. (2005) noted that this fear often arose from

a “fear of responsibility [which results from] lack of confidence” (Marschark et al., para. 2, 2005), highlighting how anxiety could emerge when interpreters assumed new roles or faced professional expectations. These findings suggest that developing professional identity was influenced by prior experiences, institutional expectations, and the gradual acquisition of skills necessary to manage both the interpreting and administrative aspects of the role. Overall, this research underscores the emotional and cognitive demands novice interpreters faced as they transitioned into professional settings and began to establish their professional identities.

Working Towards Confidence

Common themes in research on the experiences of novice interpreters include confidence and anxiety. Matilsky (2021) emphasizes the importance of confidence because “we must present ourselves as knowledgeable members of our profession in order to be respected and have our work taken seriously” (Matilsky, 2021, para. 4). This idea brings up the need for and value of having confidence within this profession and field as a whole.

Williams (2020) explored how novice interpreters develop professional identity through reflective practices within their work, both individually and in collaboration with coaches and mentors. The study found that identity formation involves more than acquiring technical skills; it also encompasses managing interpersonal dynamics, adapting to different teams, and negotiating professional expectations. Williams noted that confidence often develops gradually, as interpreters encounter barriers, receive feedback, and adjust their approach to diverse team interactions. The research emphasizes that building professional identity is closely linked to the ability to maintain poise, integrate constructive critique, and navigate complex professional environments. These findings highlight that identity development for new interpreters extends

beyond language transfer, encompassing emotional regulation, adaptive collaboration, and the ongoing negotiation of professional roles.

In the action research from Woods (2022), the researcher explored the theme of interpreting as an entry-level interpreter and how confidence interacts with the actual interpretation process. The author mentions, “Confidence helps shape this identity for new interpreters, which reflects on every decision-making skill” (Woods, 2022, p. v). Woods (2022) examined how novice interpreters develop confidence and professional identity through reflective practices and experiential learning. The study found that emerging interpreters often face anxiety related to performance and uncertainty about their professional roles. Woods highlighted that mentorship, team interactions, and constructive feedback were critical in supporting interpreters as they navigated challenges and built competence. The research also indicated that confidence and professional identity are not developed solely through technical skill acquisition, but through engaging with real-world assignments, receiving guidance, and reflecting on experiences in authentic professional contexts.

Conclusion

Taken together, these studies show that novice interpreters’ professional growth involves more than technical skill development. Confidence, identity formation, and the ability to manage anxiety emerge through experience, reflective practice, mentorship, and collaboration in real-world settings (Lopez, 2022; Marschark et al., 2005; Woods, 2022; Williams, 2020; Cabrera, 2023). Research indicates that feelings of fear and anxiety often surface when interpreters encounter new environments, unclear expectations, or internalized doubts (Chiang, 2010; Steinmetz, 2022). While these emotions can be challenging, several studies suggest that

recognizing and reflecting on them can support professional development and identity formation by encouraging self-awareness and adaptive strategies (Woods, 2022; Lopez, 2022). Overall, the literature demonstrates that developing professional identity and confidence is a gradual process shaped by experience, reflection, and engagement with mentors and collaborative teams.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study used a practitioner-based action research methodology to examine how anxiety, confidence, and professional self-perception developed during my early experiences as a novice ASL/English interpreter. Action research was selected because it allows practitioners to systematically examine their own practice while engaging in ongoing reflection and improvement. Through this approach, I documented and analyzed my experiences across interpreting assignments within a post-secondary educational setting. Data were collected through a combination of reflective journaling, assignment-based reflections, and quantitative self-ratings of anxiety. By integrating both qualitative and quantitative forms of data, this methodology allowed for a detailed exploration of how internal experiences, emotional responses, and confidence levels shifted over time as I gained experience in authentic interpreting situations.

Design

This study employed a practitioner-based action research approach to investigate how my experiences of anxiety, confidence, and self-perception developed as I engaged in interpreting work during entry into the field. The data collection methods were informed by Manseau (2022), whose approach to reflective data and journaling emphasized the connection between identity and mentorship. While Manseau's work focused on a specific cultural and racial group, the methodology was adapted here to focus on professional identity and the development of skills in a novice interpreter.

Qualitative data were collected through reflective journaling, pre- and post-assignment reflections, and informal notes taken during and after assignments. These notes served both as a means to document experiences and as a tool for preparation and self-reflection to reduce anxiety and improve performance. The journaling process allowed flexibility and vulnerability, encouraging the documentation of emotional, cognitive, and physical responses in real-time.

A quantitative data component was added through the use of a Likert scale, ranging from one (least anxiety) to five (most anxiety), which quantified stress levels across assignments. This combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches provided a richer understanding of how experiences and perceptions evolved over time. Data collection began at the start of the Winter 2025 term and continued throughout that term, encompassing multiple class assignments in a post-secondary educational setting.

Participants

The sole participant in this study is the researcher, making this a practitioner-based action research project. I am a novice ASL/English interpreter beginning professional practice after completing an interpreter education program. The focus on a single participant is intentional, as action research aims to examine change within one practitioner's practice rather than generalize findings across a population.

Data were collected exclusively from my own experiences, reflections, and perceived stress levels during authentic work assignments. While interactions with students, colleagues, and consumers were noted, they were considered only in relation to my internal experiences and were not analyzed directly. To ensure confidentiality, identifying details about individuals, courses, and assignments were omitted or generalized.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved integrating mixed-method information to identify patterns in my experiences over time. Likert-scale scores from each assignment were recorded in a Google Sheet, manually counted, and visualized in bar graphs to show the frequency of each anxiety level (1–5).

Qualitative data from journals and reflections were analyzed alongside the Likert scores to provide context for numerical trends. Entries were examined for recurring themes related to anxiety, confidence, preparation, and responses to teamwork. Changes in these themes over time were noted to identify growth, stagnation, or areas of persistent difficulty. Improvement was operationalized as reductions in self-reported anxiety and an increased ability to engage in interpreting despite discomfort.

The analysis process was iterative, with ongoing comparison between qualitative reflections and quantitative scores to validate observations. For example, high Likert scores were cross-referenced with journal entries describing physical or cognitive responses, allowing for interpretation of the underlying causes of stress and tracking changes in coping strategies. This process supported a nuanced understanding of how confidence and professional identity developed in the context of authentic interpreting assignments.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Although the study involves only the researcher as the participant, steps were taken to ensure rigor and ethical practice. Reflexive journaling allowed transparency in documenting both experiences and analytic decisions. Triangulation was achieved by comparing numerical scores, reflective notes, and observational details from assignments. Ethical considerations included the

protection of identities for students, colleagues, and consumers, and the intentional omission of identifying information. The action research framework further allowed for ongoing adaptation and reflection, ensuring that findings accurately represented the researcher's experiences without compromising confidentiality.

Transition to Results

The combination of quantitative Likert-scale scores and qualitative reflections provided an extensive view of how anxiety, confidence, and self-perception evolved over time. By examining both numerical trends and reflective narratives, patterns and themes related to performance, emotional regulation, and professional growth were identified. The following results section presents these findings, highlighting key changes, insights, and emerging patterns across assignments and reflections.

RESULTS

Introduction

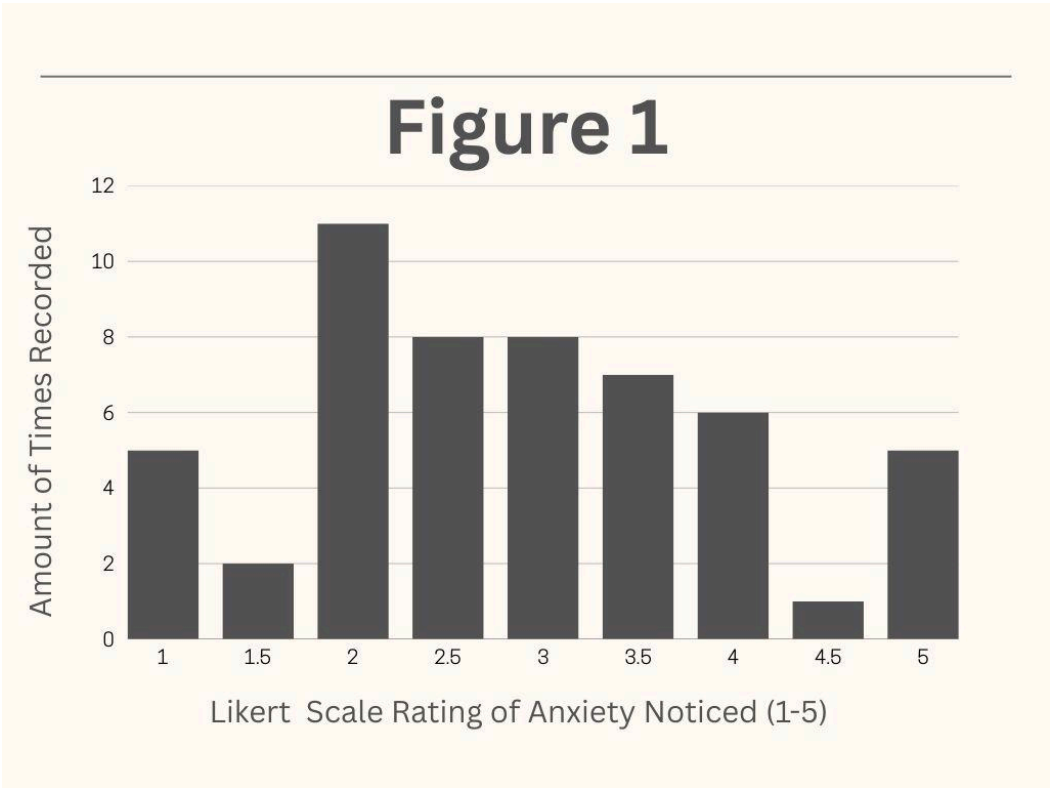
This section presents the findings from my action research examining anxiety experienced before and during interpreting assignments. Data consisted of a 1–5 Likert scale rating of anxiety levels recorded prior to and during each assignment, followed by reflective notes and journal entries describing specific reactions and experiences. These sources address the research question by identifying when anxiety emerged and how it influenced my interpreting process. The results are organized thematically, with each theme connected to the accompanying figures to illustrate patterns across assignments. Consistent with action research, the findings are presented from a reflective practitioner perspective and are grounded in my lived experiences and perceived development over time.

Likert Scale Recordings

To begin data collection, I recorded the date, the type of class/assignment as well as the Likert scale of 1-5 detailing how anxious I was feeling about going into the assignment or even during. Upon completion of each assignment, specific feelings were journaled and noted.

Figure 1

Likert Scale Recordings



Note: Recordings of all Likert scale recordings

Recording the number of times each Likert value, as a measure of perceived anxiety, appeared allowed for a clearer understanding of how frequently different anxiety levels occurred throughout the data collection period. Rather than focusing on a single average score, counting the frequency of responses made it possible to observe patterns in how anxiety was experienced across assignments. This approach highlighted whether anxiety tended to cluster around certain levels, such as moderate ratings, or if it appeared more frequently at the higher or lower ends of the scale. Examining the distribution of responses also helped identify whether extreme ratings were common or rare, providing additional context for interpreting the reflective journal entries

that accompanied each assignment. Together, the frequency counts and visualizations supported a more detailed interpretation of how anxiety levels fluctuated over time and across different interpreting situations.

Figure 1 shows the frequency of responses for each value on the Likert scale, including half-point values. The value one was selected five times, one and a half twice, two 11 times, two and a half eight times, three eight times, three and a half seven times, four six times, four and a half once, and five being recorded five times. There are a total of 53 data points, six were rated as five, indicating high anxiety, while the most frequent scores clustered around the midpoint, reflecting moderate but manageable stress.

Figure 2
Assignment Scoring on Likert Scale

	Likert Scale (1)	Likert Scale (2)	Likert Scale (3)	Likert Scale (4)	Likert Scale (5)
Class/Assignment					
Stem 1		IIII \	III \	I	I
Stem 2	\	I			
Comm. Studies Course		I \	II \ \ \	III	II
Applied Skills Course		\			
Human Services Course	\	\ \			
On-Call			I	I	
Professional Studies Course		I			
Identity Focused Assignment				I \	
Health Sciences Course		I			
Social Science Course		I \	\		
Quantitative Methods Course	I	\			
Physical Education Course	IIII	I	I		I
Community Engagement Meeting			\		
Remote Coverage					I

Note: Brief assignment description and their corresponding Likert scale ratings

All course titles and assignment labels included in this study have been intentionally generalized. While the terminology has been modified, the nature and structure of each assignment remain accurately represented for analysis, aligning with ethical research practices and supporting the integrity of the reflective process.

Figure 2 presents the distribution of Likert-scale responses by class and assignment type. In this figure, a vertical bar (|) represents a single response for a whole-number value, and a backslash (\) represents a single response for a half-number value (for example, two and a half). This visualization allows for a clear comparison of responses across different assignments and contexts.

The spreadsheet shows the distribution of Likert-scale responses across class types and assignments. For STEM One, responses ranged from two (five times) to five (once), with two and a half recorded twice, three recorded four times, three and a half recorded seven times, and four recorded once. STEM Two was recorded once at one and a half and once at two. Communication Studies ranged from two to five, with most responses clustering between three and three and a half. Applied Skills was recorded once at two and a half. Human Services had one response at one and a half and two at two and a half. On-Call Academics were recorded once at three and once at four. Professional Studies was recorded once at two. The Identity-Focused Assignment had one response at four and one at four and a half. Health Sciences was recorded once at two. Social Science responses included two, two and a half, and three and a half. Quantitative Methods was recorded once at one and once at two and a half. Physical Education ranged from one (four times) to five (once), with two and three recorded once each. A Community Engagement Meeting was recorded once at three and a half, and Remote Coverage was recorded once at five.

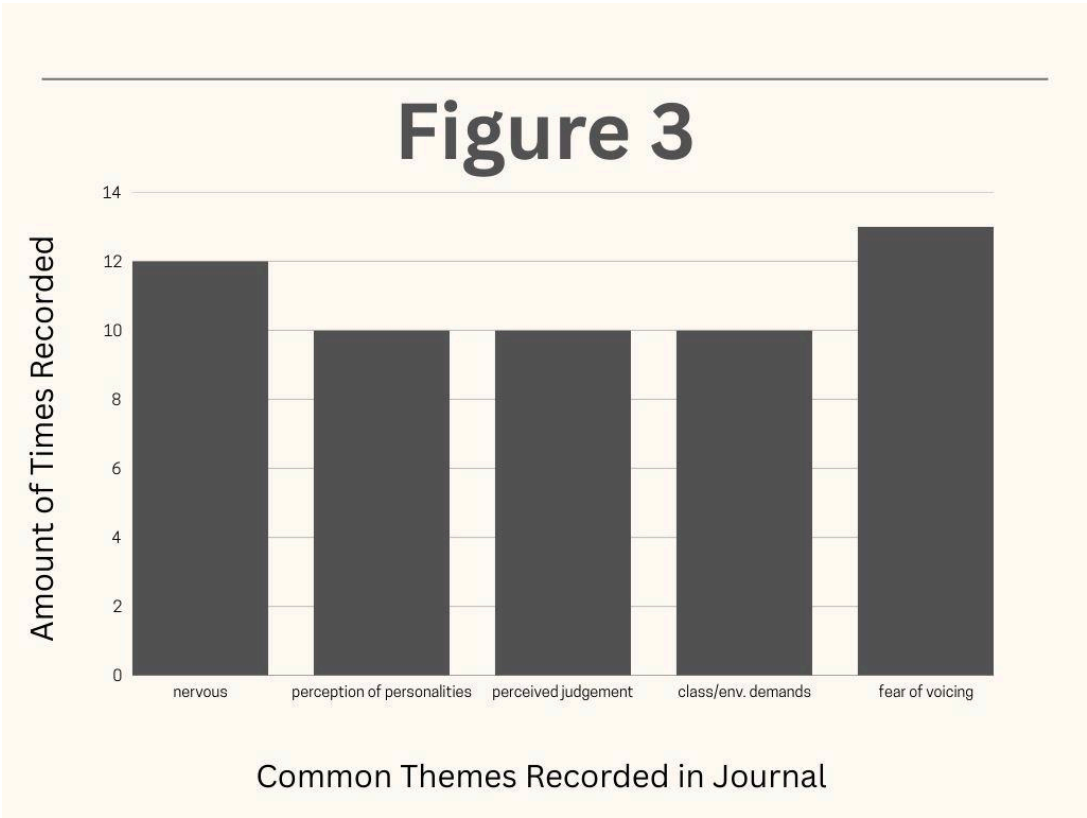
Common Themes Recorded in Journal

During the process of recording quantitative data on the Likert scale, qualitative notes were also journaled in correlation with each recorded score. **Figure 3** illustrates the primary

internal responses that emerged during data collection. The most common themes included general anxiety, responses triggered by perception of personalities, responses triggered by perceived judgement, responses prompted by class or environmental demands, and fear of voicing or interpreting aloud. These themes frequently appeared during new or unfamiliar assignments and when unexpected challenges arose, often corresponding with higher Likert-scale anxiety scores. In contrast, situations involving familiar personalities, interpersonal relationships, or environments were typically associated with lower anxiety scores. Across the data, a consistent pattern emerged showing how external factors such as behavior, dynamics, and environmental demands influenced internal responses, highlighting the situational sources of anxiety for novice interpreters. These findings complement the quantitative results and provide insight into the emotional aspects of early professional experiences.

Figure 3

Common Themes Bar Graph



Note: A bar graph to represent the themes, Y axis being the amount of times it is noted while the X axis represents the themes present

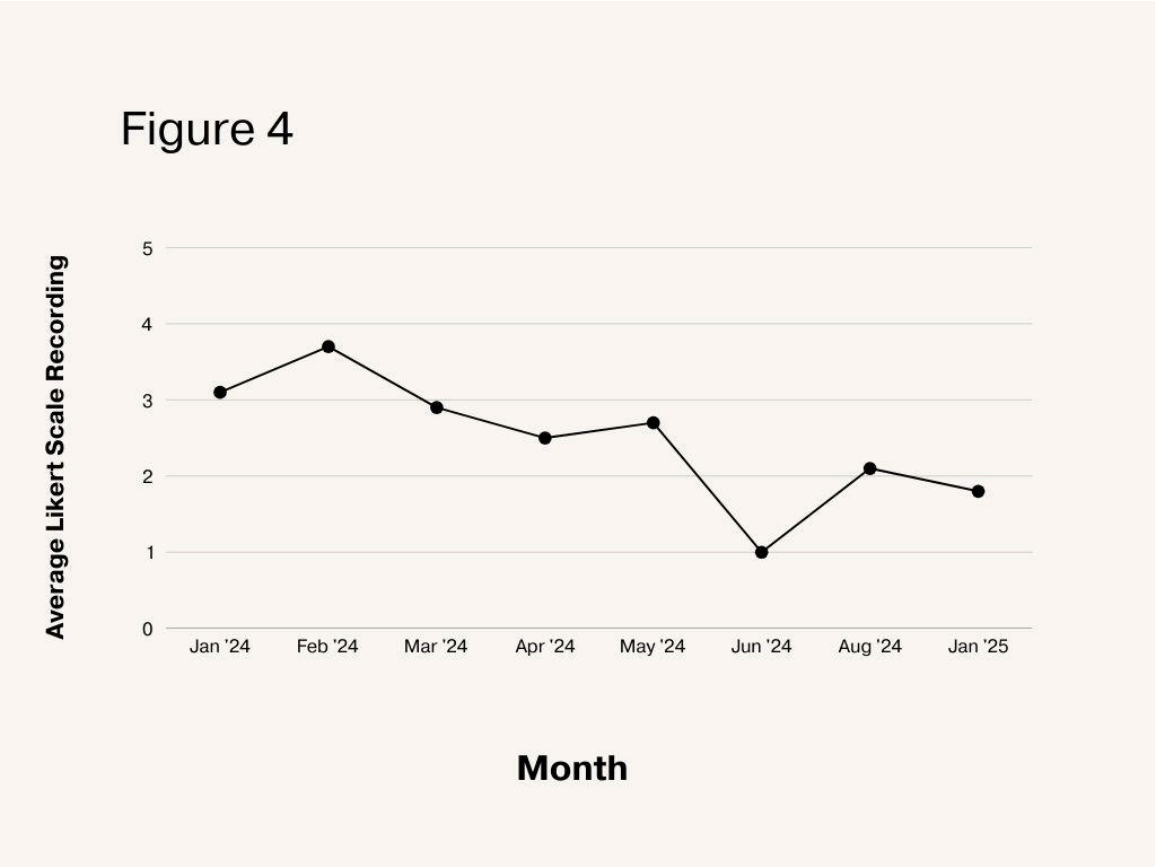
Above it is shown that the feeling of nervousness was recorded 12 times, feelings correlated with the perception of personalities was recorded 10 times, feelings correlated with perceived judgement was recorded 10 times, feelings correlated with the class/environmental demands recorded 10 times, and lastly the fear of voicing was recorded 13 times times. Some of these qualitative data recordings stood alone, while others were happening simultaneously (e.g., feeling nervous because of environmental demand). Both were recorded on the chart in their

respective section. *Figure 3* above shows the recordings in a visual aspect, a bar graph. This figure allows the reader to see comparatively how many times each theme was recorded. Seeing the bar graph visually allows the understanding of what was most affecting the recorded scores in *Figure 1* and *Figure 2*.

Chronological Data Collection Recordings

Figure 4

Chronological Data Recordings



Note: The average data recorded from mid-January 2025 to mid-January 2026

Figure 4 presents the average Likert-scale scores documented throughout the data collection period. This table is included to provide transparency in how the data were

summarized and to illustrate the overall progression of anxiety levels over time. Presenting the data as averages allows readers to observe general trends and fluctuations across the duration of the project rather than focusing on individual recordings. While earlier figures highlight patterns visually, this averaged record demonstrates how those patterns are reflected in the overall scores. Identifying details related to specific assignments, courses, or individuals were intentionally omitted to protect confidentiality and uphold human subjects protections.

The averaged data show trends of higher anxiety scores early in the data collection period, with lower scores recorded in later periods. For example, the first day recorded in January 2025 shows an average score of 5, while a later average score recorded at the beginning of January 2026, drops to 1. These trends provide context for the subsequent summary and analysis, which examine how anxiety shifted over time and under different conditions.

Summary

Taken together, the quantitative ratings and qualitative reflections revealed recurring patterns in how anxiety appeared across assignments and how it shifted over time. Anxiety was most pronounced during new or unfamiliar assignments, when expectations were unclear, or when navigating complex dynamics. Internal reactions, including self-doubt, fear of voicing, and heightened awareness of performance, consistently accompanied these moments. Rather than remaining constant, my recorded experiences fluctuated in relation to these specific contexts and interpersonal dynamics. The chronological record also demonstrated noticeable change throughout the data collection period, suggesting development and growing confidence rather than isolated events. While the results document when and under what conditions anxiety was present, they do not by themselves explain the significance of these patterns. The following

discussion section considers how these findings relate to interpreter learning, self-perception, and professional growth.

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to better understand how my experiences of anxiety, confidence, and self-perception developed as I engaged in interpreting work when joining the field. Through ongoing reflection, Likert-scale ratings, and journaling across assignments, several patterns became visible in both my internal responses and my decision-making during practice. While the results section described what occurred, this section focuses on what those experiences mean and how they inform my growth as an interpreter.

As an action research project, the goal was not only to observe my experiences but to interpret them in order to adjust my approach to work. The themes that emerged from the data included the influence of preparation on anxiety levels, the role of familiarity with content and environment, the impact of perceived expectations from others, and the gradual development of professional confidence. These themes suggest that my reactions were not random or purely situational; rather, they were connected to preparedness, familiarity, perceived expectations, and my developing professional identity. For example, higher anxiety was often associated with unfamiliar material or uncertainty about expectations, while increased preparation and repeated exposure to similar assignments corresponded with greater confidence and reduced stress. Over time, the data also reflected a shift from focusing primarily on fear of mistakes toward a greater emphasis on task engagement and problem solving during interpreting. Examining these patterns alongside existing literature allows me to understand how anxiety and confidence function within the process of becoming an interpreter, rather than viewing them simply as personal strengths or weaknesses.

This discussion therefore explores how my internal regulation influenced performance, how experience reshaped my sense of competence, and how intentional reflection supported increased agency in my work. These interpretations ultimately inform both my future practice and my understanding of entry-level interpreter development.

Discussion of the Findings

The results from the Likert scale suggest that emotions were initially very high, with early recordings reflecting extreme fear and anxiety when I encountered new assignments. Over time, however, these intense feelings gradually decreased as I gained more experience and exposure to interpreting tasks. Most of the recordings fell around the midpoint of the scale, indicating that moderate anxiety was the most common experience throughout the data collection period. These results suggest that emotions were present during the first phase of data tracking, but they did not manifest as debilitating fear. Instead, the feelings included mild nervousness, anticipation, and heightened awareness before assignments, reflecting engagement with the work rather than avoidance. This aligns with an ongoing desire to improve and continue learning as an interpreter. Experiencing a moderate level of nerves can act as a motivator, encouraging preparation, reflection, and openness to feedback. In contrast, becoming overly comfortable in interpreting work may create a false sense of confidence that limits growth. When interpreters feel too comfortable, it can lead to a more closed mindset, where feedback and opportunities for improvement are not as readily embraced, even though they are essential for continued development in this field (Dean and Pollard, 2013; Schön, 1983).

This change did not feel like I simply became comfortable during the assignments; rather, my relationship with uncertainty changed. Early in the data collection, unfamiliarity was

interpreted by me as a signal that I was unprepared or incapable. Because of this interpretation, my cognitive resources shifted toward monitoring my own performance instead of processing the message. As I gained experience, unfamiliar situations no longer automatically meant failure. Instead, they became information-gathering moments. The anxiety therefore did not disappear, but it stopped controlling my attention. I was still aware of nervous feelings, yet I was able to continue interpreting while feeling them. This suggests the development was not the removal of anxiety, but increased tolerance of it.

Looking at my experiences over the research period, I noticed that certain demands and variables influenced my emotions and physical responses. For instance, when interpreting in a familiar class or with a team I had built rapport with, I tended to feel more confident and at ease. In newer situations, however, my anxiety was heightened, making it more difficult to take turns getting my hands up and interpreting. The presence of new demands and transitions between different teams also played a role, as each team had its own style and expectations, adding another layer of self-imposed pressure. My reflections and raw data notes frequently mentioned feeling pressure from both teams and consumers. Overall, these experiences illustrate that no single factor was solely responsible for my anxiety; rather, it was shaped by multiple overlapping pressures occurring simultaneously. I also observed that when I worked with teams I was comfortable with, my recorded Likert-scale scores tended to be lower, reflecting reduced anxiety.

The presence of a team appeared to function less as actual assistance and more as a psychological safety signal. When I trusted the team, I allowed myself to attempt interpretations even when unsure. When I did not yet understand the team's expectations, I interpreted their silence or behavior as evaluation. This often resulted in hesitation, delayed turn-taking, or

avoidance of voicing. In these moments I was not only interpreting the classroom content but also interpreting how I believed I was being perceived. The data suggests my anxiety was strongly connected to perceived judgment rather than task difficulty alone.

Simultaneously, I started to notice how experience and preparation helped ease some of these feelings. The more I interpreted in different classes and situations, the more I found ways to manage my nerves. While the anxiety didn't completely disappear, I became better at dealing with it and learned strategies that made the process feel less overwhelming. Over time, the recorded Likert-scale scores show a steady decline in the intensity of fear. Not only did the actual scores decrease, but the corresponding journal entries became increasingly positive. While the nerves may have still registered as higher at times, the overall mindset shifted. For example, one journal entry states, "I am nervous, but I got this! This is just a chance to learn and grow," which contrasts with earlier notes such as, "my hands felt frazzled, I couldn't get up to interpret." These reflections indicate that as I gained more experience and exposure, participating in the interpretation process became easier and more manageable.

Over time, preparation shifted from attempting to eliminate mistakes to increasing readiness to respond. Early preparation was focused on preventing problems, which made any unexpected moment feel like a breakdown in competence. Later preparation focused on flexibility, allowing unexpected language or pacing to be managed instead of avoided. This reflects a shift from performance-based thinking ("I must do this correctly") to process-based thinking ("I can work through this in real time"). As this shift occurred, my confidence no longer depended on how perfectly an assignment went but on my ability to remain engaged in the interpreting process.

Many journal entries documented strong physical reactions including shaking hands, freezing, mental blanking, and difficulty initiating voicing. These reactions often appeared before any actual interpreting error occurred, indicating they were anticipatory rather than reactive. When these responses were strongest, my processing ability decreased and I either delayed my turn or avoided voicing entirely. Later in the data collection, similar physical sensations appeared but no longer stopped participation. This suggests the barrier to performance was not the presence of stress activation but my interpretation of it. Early on, physiological stress response signaled danger and halted processing. Later, the same sensations were experienced as activation that could coexist with interpreting. My performance improved not because the reactions disappeared, but because they no longer dictated my behavioral response.

Overall, the findings suggest that novice interpreter anxiety may be less about skill deficiency and more about managing perceived evaluation, uncertainty, and internal physiological reactions simultaneously. Experience alone did not reduce anxiety; rather, experience changed how I understood and responded to it. Confidence emerged not from consistently successful interpretations but from repeatedly remaining engaged despite discomfort. The development observed across this project reflects movement from avoidance-based participation toward adaptive participation, where anxiety remained present but no longer prevented action. Similar patterns have been noted in interpreting research, where fear and stress related to evaluation or difficult source material can influence participation and performance (Chiang, 2010).

Summary

This study highlights how anxiety, confidence, and self-perception evolved during my early experiences as an interpreter. Across assignments, data revealed that initial anxiety was high, particularly in unfamiliar situations, but gradually declined as exposure and experience increased. Importantly, this change did not reflect the elimination of anxiety, but rather an increased tolerance for it and a shift in how uncertainty was perceived. Early on, unfamiliar situations triggered self-monitoring and fear of failure, whereas later they became opportunities for information gathering and adaptive engagement.

Multiple factors influenced emotional and physical responses, including team dynamics, prior rapport, and perceived evaluation by both peers and consumers. Anxiety was shaped by overlapping pressures rather than a single source, and the presence of a trusted team functioned as a psychological safety signal that encouraged participation. Preparation also evolved over time, moving from a focus on preventing mistakes to a process-oriented readiness that allowed for flexibility in responding to unexpected situations.

Physiological responses, such as shaking or freezing, were initially disruptive but later coexisted with effective interpreting. This illustrates that performance barriers were linked to the interpretation of stress rather than stress itself. Overall, the findings suggest that confidence develops from sustained engagement in the presence of discomfort. Novice interpreter anxiety appears to be connected to managing uncertainty, perceived evaluation, and internal reactions, and growth emerges from learning to navigate these simultaneously.

CONCLUSION

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this action research project was to examine how anxiety, confidence, and self-perception developed during my early experiences as a novice ASL/English interpreter. Through a combination of Likert-scale ratings and reflective journaling, I tracked patterns in my emotional, cognitive, and physical responses across authentic assignments in a post-secondary setting.

The findings revealed that anxiety was initially high, particularly in unfamiliar environments and when working with new teams. However, over time, the intensity of anxiety decreased. More importantly, the data demonstrated that growth did not occur because anxiety disappeared, but because my relationship to it changed. Early experiences were marked by avoidance, hesitation, and self-monitoring driven by fear of evaluation. Later experiences showed increased tolerance of discomfort, improved emotional regulation, and a shift toward process-oriented thinking.

Anxiety was influenced by multiple overlapping factors, including team dynamics, perceived expectations, environmental demands, and internal self-talk. The presence of trusted teams functioned as a psychological safety signal, allowing greater participation. Preparation evolved from an attempt to prevent mistakes to an effort to increase flexibility and readiness. Physiological stress responses, such as shaking or mental blanking, did not vanish over time; instead, they became sensations that coexisted with action rather than barriers to participation.

Through the lenses of reflective practice and experiential learning, these experiences can be understood not solely as personal shortcomings but as part of the learning process that occurs

through engagement with real interpreting work. Reflecting on moments of anxiety, uncertainty, and performance pressure allowed these experiences to become opportunities for professional learning rather than simply obstacles to overcome. The pressure to perform competently and meet perceived expectations contributed to the anxiety experienced during early professional practice, but it also created opportunities for reflection and adjustment. Viewing these experiences through these frameworks reframes anxiety as a natural component of experiential learning and professional development, where growth occurs through continued practice, reflection, and adaptation rather than immediate mastery.

Overall, this study suggests that novice interpreter anxiety is closely connected to perceived evaluation, uncertainty, and the development of professional identity. Confidence emerged not from flawless performance but from repeated engagement despite discomfort.

Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations emerge for interpreter education programs, mentors, teams, and novice interpreters.

Integrate Emotional Regulation into Interpreter Education

Interpreter education programs often emphasize message production, ethics, and technical skill development. However, this research indicates that emotional regulation and performance anxiety significantly affect participation and decision-making. Programs should intentionally incorporate discussions of performance anxiety, physiological stress responses, and strategies for managing self-talk. Normalizing these experiences may reduce shame and increase resilience among students transitioning into professional roles.

Provide Structured Teaming and Mentorship Support

The data demonstrated that trusted team relationships reduced anxiety and increased participation. Mentorship programs that explicitly discuss team expectations, turn-taking norms, feedback styles, and communication preferences could ease the transition from student to professional. Rather than assuming novice interpreters will independently determine teaming dynamics, structured guidance could foster psychological safety and accelerate identity development.

Encourage Reflective Practice Early and Continuously

The journaling process in this study was instrumental in identifying patterns and reframing anxiety. Encouraging novice interpreters to engage in structured reflective practice through journaling, supervision, or coaching may help them distinguish between skill-based errors and stress-based reactions. Reflection supports metacognitive awareness and promotes adaptive responses to discomfort.

Reframe Anxiety as Activation Rather Than Incompetence

A significant shift occurred when physiological stress was interpreted as activation rather than evidence of failure. Novice interpreters may benefit from education that explains stress responses as natural performance activation. This reframing may prevent avoidance behaviors and support continued engagement in challenging assignments.

Expand Research to Include Broader Populations

Because this was a practitioner-based action research study with a single participant, findings are not intended to be generalized. Future research could examine similar patterns among multiple novice interpreters across various settings, including community, medical, and

agency work, and over longer time frames. Comparative studies could explore how mentorship structures, workplace culture, or institutional support influence anxiety trajectories.

Final Conclusions

I began this action research project with a desire to understand why fear felt so debilitating at the start of my interpreting career. What emerged was not a simple reduction of anxiety, but a deeper understanding of how growth occurs within discomfort. Anxiety did not signal that I was incapable. It signaled that I was entering unfamiliar professional territory shaped by expectations, evaluation, and responsibility.

Over time, my responses to anxiety shifted as I gained experience and reflected on my interpreting practice. I learned that confidence is not the absence of fear, but the willingness to act alongside it. Professional identity developed not through perfection, but through repeated engagement, reflection, and recalibration.

By acknowledging the emotional realities of entry into the interpreting profession, this study contributes to a broader conversation about the human experience behind the work. Interpreters are not neutral machines transferring meaning. They are professionals navigating cognitive load, interpersonal dynamics, and internal regulation simultaneously.

Ultimately, this research reinforces the importance of self-awareness, mentorship, and intentional reflection in the development of novice interpreters. Addressing anxiety openly rather than dismissing it creates space for growth, resilience, and sustainable professional identity formation. Through continued reflection and practice, fear becomes not a barrier but a catalyst for development within the interpreting profession.

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APPENDIX A

Likert-Scale Survey Questions for Interpreting Assignments

Participant asked to rate their anxiety, confidence, and stress before each interpreting assignment on a 1–5 scale (1 = least anxiety, 5 = most anxiety). The questions were:

1. How nervous do you feel about this interpreting assignment? (1–5)
2. How confident do you feel in your ability to perform this assignment successfully? (1–5)
3. How much anxiety or stress do you feel about potential challenges during this assignment? (1–5)

Optional space was provided for brief written comments after each assignment.

APPENDIX B

Reflection Prompts for Interpreting Assignments

After each assignment, participant responded to the following prompts to guide written reflection:

1. Describe any moments during the assignment when you felt nervous or anxious.
2. How did these feelings impact your performance?
3. What strategies, if any, did you use to manage these feelings?