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Analyzing University Students' Learning Needs to Improve English Presentation Skills

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Abstract

Presentation skills are essential to public speaking, which is part of English learning. Regarding its importance, the English presentation usually focuses on language production and general presentation skills. This can be ineffective since there are many aspects of presentation skills. To make it more efficient, a need analysis should be done to determine which skills learners still find difficult. Therefore, this study tries to find what presentation skills should be prioritized in English learning. To respond to the problem, a survey was conducted by distributing a questionnaire to 149 university students from the Informatics department. The result showed that the top 5 most difficult aspects are engaging the interest of the audience, speaking clearly or pronunciation, handling the audience questions, getting the timing right, and putting thoughts/ideas into speech. In terms of the skill dimension, verbal and nonverbal communication is considered the most difficult. This finding should be taken into account when designing English learning activities.

Keywords: learning activities; need analysis; presentation skills; university students

Introduction

In today's globalized world, effective communication using the global language, English, is a paramount skill for university students to shape. As they prepare to enter competitive job markets or academic environments, the ability to conduct communication confidently and coherently becomes a critical asset (Sumaiya, Srivastava, Jain, & Prakash, 2022). A report by Sherif (2024) showed that 14 % of respondents indicated effective communication is at the second rank of the most sought-after soft skills worldwide.

Data from Pumble website (2024) showed that 69% of global employers seek new recruits with skills in presenting. Thus, a skill that students need to nurture through courses such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is to deliver presentations (Živković, 2014).

This is essential, as it not only facilitates the clear and persuasive sharing of specialized knowledge but also enhances professional credibility and fosters collaboration in diverse fields. Mastering presentation skills enables ESP students to articulate their expertise, engage with audiences, and navigate the complexities of cross-cultural communication, ultimately empowering them to succeed in their respective disciplines. Thus, cultivating strong presentation abilities is not merely an academic requirement; it is a vital component of their professional development and future success (Mousawa & Elyas, 2015; Simona, 2015).

Recent research on EFL students' presentation skills highlights various approaches and challenges in developing these competencies. Common challenges include speech anxiety, lack of confidence, and gaps in knowledge, linguistics features (grammar and vocabulary) and skills (King, 2002; Pham et al., 2022). Another finding revealed that students are found to rely too much on textbooks (Quy Khuong & Ngoc Bao Thi, 2023).

Indonesian university students face challenges in improving presentation skills due to psychological factors like nervousness and shyness (Syahfutra, Wibowo, Ardiya, & Febtiningsih, 2019; Wulandari, Piscioneri, & Ikram, 2021; Zakaria, Rusli, Mat, & Tazijan, 2023), linguistic issues such as lack of vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties (Paramudia, Akhmad, Amri, & Fahlevi, 2024; Syahfutra et al., 2019), and environmental factors including ineffective class schedules and audience behavior (Ariani, 2019; Wulandari et al., 2021).

Effective teaching strategies and course designs are essential to address these issues and enhance EFL students' presentation abilities. Studies have shown that targeted interventions, such as Blackboard-mediated programs (Algouzi et al., 2023), project-based learning (Sirisrimangkorn, 2021), communicative approach (Bosley & Anuyahong, 2018), and modelling (Zeevy-Solovey, 2019), can significantly improve students' presentation skills.

A study by Hartono, Mujiyanto, Fitriati, & Sakhiyya, (2024) found that Indonesian ESP undergraduate students exhibited significant improvements in their presentation self-efficacy when engaged in structured presentation tasks, highlighting the role of practice in building confidence and competence. Additionally, Afifah et al., (2024) emphasized that actional competence—defined as the ability to engage in communication processes effectively—is vital for successful presentations, suggesting that ESP students should focus on enhancing their communicative practices to achieve better learning.

While extensive research has been conducted on the challenges and strategies for developing students' presentation skills, a significant gap remains in understanding the specific needs and perceptions of students themselves regarding this skill. Existing studies often focus on pedagogical approaches and instructional techniques from the educators' perspective, leaving limited exploration of how students perceive their own strengths, weaknesses, and preferred methods for improvement.

This lack of insight into student-centered perspectives may lead to a disconnect between the strategies employed and the actual needs of learners. Addressing this gap is urgent, as presentation skills are increasingly recognized as essential for academic and professional success (Mak, 2021). This research describes students' needs and perceptions of their presentation skills. The study implemented a quantitative method using a questionnaire to collect and describe data regarding students' learning needs to develop their presentation skills. The findings are expected to provide tailored and effective learning activities to foster the improvement of students' presentation skills.

Method

There are many aspects of the presentation that need to be prepared. This study implemented a quantitative method using a questionnaire to find out the student's needs in their presentation skills and get insights into the difficulty level of each aspect. Then, a purposive sampling was chosen to select the respondents. The respondents of this questionnaire were non-English students majoring in Information Systems and Informatics. They comprised 103 students in the second semester of Information Systems and 46 in the third semester of Informatics. The students learned subjects of English for communication business and English for specific purposes, respectively.

Some studies showed how presentation aspects were broken down and assessed (Evans, 2013; Peeters, Sahloff, & Stone, 2010). A study by Khorwal et al., (2024) implemented a rubric by Peeters et al. (2010) and showed that the majority covered the topic in-depth. However, some parts were still unclear, and some ended the presentation without a summary or conclusion. Evans (2013) divided the presentation skills into presentation planning, presentation structure, verbal and non-verbal communication, and visual aids.

He found that the following were the most problematic presentation skills: skills of engaging the audience's interest, handling the audience's questions, speaking in a natural spoken style, and using appropriate stress and intonation. Noting from the previous study, Chan, (2010) compiled the aspects of presentation skills, as seen in Table 1, which later was used as the instrument of this study. The reliability of the instrument was tested in a previous study and showed a good

degree of reliability (Evans, 2013).

Table 1. Aspects of Presentation Skills

No	Dimension	Aspects
1	Planning Presentation	Understanding the needs of the audience
2		Planning a presentation
3		Getting the timing right
4		Engaging the interest of the audience
5	Structuring presentation	Introducing a presentation
6		Developing ideas in the body of a presentation
7		Concluding a presentation
8		Handling the audience's question
9		Making smooth transition from points to points
10		Organising information/ideas logically
11	Verbal and non-verbal	Putting your thoughts/ideas into speech
12	communication	Speaking clearly (pronunciation)
13		Speaking in a very natural style
14		Using appropriate stress and intonation
15		Maintaining eye contact
16		Speaking at the right speed
17	Visual aids and support	Presenting data in tables, charts, etc.
18	materials	Presenting with the help of notes/prompts
19		Using visual aids effectively

Four Likert scales were used to answer the questionnaire, consisting of four levels of difficulties such as very easy, easy, difficult, and very difficult. The questionnaire was distributed to students using Microsoft Forms. The tool was chosen to distribute the questionnaire because all students enrolling in this university have Microsoft accounts. This simplified the process of log in into the tool. The questionnaire was distributed in June 2022 in the classroom.

After the data was obtained, it was checked to find some invalid data. Some data were found to have the same answer from numbers 1 to 19, and the completion time was less than 1 minute. These kinds of data were assumed to be invalid because the respondent might not read the indicators and only answer the questions randomly. After eliminating some data, the data was analyzed by calculating the average of the aspects and dimensions. The calculation started by converting the scales into numbers: very easy means 1, easy 2, difficult 3, and very difficult 4. The dimension average was obtained by calculating the average of the average of aspects in the dimension.

Results

There were 19 aspects included in the questionnaire. The result of a total of 149 respondents can be seen in the table below. The aspects here are categorized into four dimensions: presentation planning, presentation structuring, verbal and non-verbal communication, visual aids, and support materials (Chan, 2020; Evans, 2013; Peeters et al., 2010)The questionnaire used 4 Likert scale. Scale 1 represents very easy, scale 2 easy, scale 3 difficult, and scale 4 very difficult. So, the higher the score, the more difficult the skills to master.

Table 2. Students' Perception of The Presentation Skills Difficulty

Dimension	Aspects	Aspect Avg	Dimension Avg
	Understanding the needs of the audience	2,56	2,64
Planning	Planning a presentation	2,36	
presentation	Engaging the interest of the audience	2,93	
	Getting the timing right	2,73	
	Introducing a presentation	2,30	2,58
	Developing ideas in the body of a presentation	2,62	
Ctrusturing	Concluding a presentation	2,68	
Structuring	Handling the audience's question	2,74	
presentation	Making smooth transition from points to points	2,60	
	Organising information/ideas logically	2,56	
	Putting your thoughts/ideas into speech	2,71	2,66
1 1 1	Speaking clearly (pronunciation)	2,77	
verbal and non-	Speaking in a very natural style	2,68	
verbal communication	Using appropriate stress and intonation	2,66	
	Maintaining eye contact	2,48	
	Speaking at the right speed	2,67	
Visual aids and	Presenting data in tables, charts, etc.	2,61	2,35
support materials	Presenting with the help of notes/prompts	2,05	

Dimension	Aspects	Aspect Avg	Dimension Avg
	Using visual aids effectively	2,40	

Based on Table 2, it can be seen that the lowest dimension average is visual aids, with an average of 2.35. The difficulty level of the dimensions increases from structuring presentation (2.35), planning presentation (2.64), and verbal and nonverbal communication (2.66). The easiest aspects to master in presentation for each dimension are respectively presenting with the help of notes/prompts (2.05), introducing a presentation (2.30), planning a presentation (2.36), and maintaining eye contact (2.48). On the contrary, the most difficult aspects of each dimension are introducing a presentation, presenting data in tables, charts, etc. (2.61), speaking clearly/pronouncing (2.77), and engaging the interest of the audience (2,93).

In general, the five most difficult aspects are engaging the interest of the audience (2.93), speaking clearly/pronunciation (2.77), handling the audience questions (2.74), getting the timing right (2.73), and putting thoughts/ideas into speech (2.71). Teachers need to consider these aspects of the difficulty level.

Discussion

Challenges of Presentation Aspects for Students

Figure 1 displays the most challenging aspects that the students encountered when they delivered presentations. It shows four aspects such as engaging the audiences' interest, speaking clearly with proper pronunciation, handling questions from audiences, and getting the timing right.

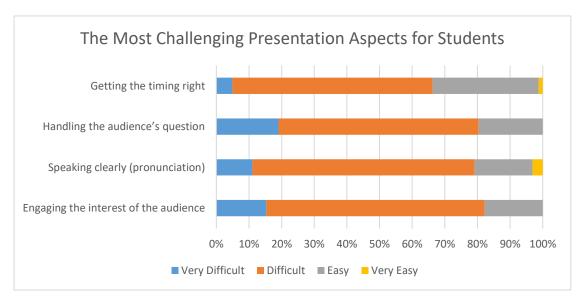


Figure 1. The Most Challenging Presentation Aspects for Students

From the survey, it was obtained that the biggest challenge in teaching presentation skills is engaging the audience's interest. This skill involves not only language skills but also content mastery and communication skills. Lasekan, Pachava, Godoy Pena, Golla, & Raje, (2024) conducted a study that shows that course content can engage students when relevant. To be able to engage audiences, presenters must be able to deliver the material efficiently. This means they must understand their audience and what is relevant to them. In practice, the delivery plays an important role in the presentation's success. Although presenters have interesting material but deliver it poorly, the audience will not find the presentation interesting.

Engagement can also be built by creating interaction between presenters and the audience. Lack of interaction in learning can cause low student retention, meaning they pay little attention to the presentation. They mostly focus on the material they will present and ignore the audience. In addition, the length of the presentation should be considered as well. A study by Kravchenko & Cass (2018) revealed students' retention in watching shorter videos got more positive feedback. In terms of presentation, presenters should pay attention to their timing to retain the audience's attention.

The second challenge in a presentation is to speak and pronounce the language clearly. Pronunciation has been a challenge for English as a foreign language (EFL) speakers due to the accent differences coming from the first language influences when communicating in English. These different accents really affect the intelligibility or how language is perceived by others when speaking

Clear pronunciation also represents English proficiency in that they can differentiate the pronunciation of words in English. If they mispronounce the words, the audience will perceive the information incorrectly. In other words, it will be difficult for presenters to deliver the material clearly if they do not have sufficient English knowledge, including pronunciation skills. A study by Dzormeku, Veermans, & McMullen (2024) showed that language proficiency is related to self-efficacy, which is the ability to control their cognitive process and behavior. To overcome the language challenges, the study also suggests that learners need to improve their knowledge of micro-skills, such as vocabulary knowledge, pronunciation, and grammar skills.

The third challenge is handling questions from the audience. This finding aligns with some studies (Evans, 2013; Khorwal et al., 2024; Mardiningrum & Ramadhani, 2022), saying that this aspect is the most difficult. The reason is that the audience can intimidate the presenters (Mardiningrum & Ramadhani, 2022). Besides that, this session was the most uncontrollable because the audience could ask anything. Khorwal et al., (2024) study showed that most of the presenters did not execute the questions and answer session appropriately. The presenters tended

to answer vaguely and repeat questions for the audience, give superficial answers, and avoid questions or give incorrect responses. When they do that, they seem not to master the material well.

The other challenges are getting the timing right, which is part of the presentation planning dimension, and putting thoughts/ideas into speech. This means that the presenters must be able to adjust the material to fit the time allocated. However, the execution does not always go as planned. This skill aspect is related to the dimension of verbal and nonverbal communication. Difficulties in putting thoughts/ideas into speech can result in time dragging due to pauses or fillers, shortening the presentation, or unclear presentation. These two aspects are bound to the level of language proficiency. As aforementioned, language proficiency is related to self-efficacy. When the presenters have good language proficiency, they will be able to control what they are going to say (Dzormeku et al., 2024). They know the correct expressions to answer the audience's questions, too. On the contrary, low language proficiency causes the presentation to be ineffective.

Proposed Learning Activities

This section discusses the proposed learning activities as strategies to deal with the students' challenges in improving their presentation skills. This research revealed that the most difficult aspect is to engage the interest of the audience. Usera (2023) suggests five universal techniques implemented by the presenter to engage the audience: Polling, Discussion, Recitation, Imagination, and Reflection. The students can practice preparing various polling sessions, generating discussion questions, reciting a phrase or word together, creating a scenario that leads the audience to have an imagination and reflection, and planning interactive sessions that can be done with each other. (Namin, Ketron, Kaltcheva, & Winsor, 2021)conducted a study that revealed a significant improvement in students' presentation skills when they create presentation videos.

The students perform better in presenting the central message, supporting material, language organization, and delivery. Regarding the video duration that would engage the audience, research conducted by Kravchenko & Cass (2018) revealed that using shorter video engages the students more in learning. The teacher could implement this strategy as a requirement for students to work on creating their presentation videos.

The previous strategy can also be implemented to handle the students' issue related to their pronunciation. Students can create short presentation videos on many platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. A study conducted by Merizawati et al. (2024) revealed that using TikTok to create videos motivated the students to practice pronunciation. TikTok attracted the students to practice more since it is easy and fun. In addition, the students can explore and learn more from the content creators according to their preferences. Teachers can implement this

strategy to create a more autonomous space for learning outside of class, allowing the students to be more motivated to do self-learning by utilizing social media.

Dealing with handling questions is the most common problem faced by Asian learners since they also have issues regarding formulating questions and expressing themselves. Therefore, in the context of students' presentation performance, they experience challenges of conducting a discussion with the audience including handling questions. The study conducted by Jang (2022) suggested a practical activity for students to formulate questions by employing a web-based questioning method to enhance audience engagement. This strategy can be an alternative for students to practice formulating questions to form confidence and anticipate questions that they can later handle better.

Implications of the Study

The results indicate the students' needs analysis in improving their presentation skills. This benefits educators in developing teaching strategies and learning activities accurately, as well as curriculum developers and material developers. They could consider more interactive and reflective tasks such as polling sessions and discussion questions. Besides, teachers can use various social media platforms that allow students to practice presenting outside of the classroom. The students would be exposed more to practices to improve their presentation technique and confidence.

Conclusion

This study seeks to explore students' needs and perceptions regarding their presentation skills. The results aim to inform the development of customized and effective learning activities to enhance students' abilities in delivering presentations. The findings highlight varying levels of proficiency across different dimensions of students' presentation skills. The highest-rated dimension is verbal and non-verbal communication, with an average score of 2.66, indicating moderate proficiency in areas such as clear pronunciation and natural speaking style.

In contrast, visual aids and support material dimension received the lowest average score of 2.35, suggesting significant challenges in effectively using visual aids and presenting data with notes or prompts. The dimensions of planning and structuring presentations scored 2.64 and 2.58, respectively, reflecting moderate difficulties in tasks such as engaging the audience, organizing ideas logically, and transitioning smoothly between points. Overall, these results suggest the need for targeted interventions focusing on improving the effective use of visual aids and enhancing students' ability to plan and structure their presentations systematically.

Engaging the audience is identified as the most difficult aspect, and techniques like polling, discussion, recitation, imagination, and reflection are proposed to make presentations more interactive. Research highlights the effectiveness of creating presentation videos in enhancing delivery, language organization, and central message clarity, with shorter videos proving more engaging. Platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram are recommended for practicing pronunciation, with TikTok being particularly motivating due to its ease and fun nature.

Additionally, students struggle with handling audience questions, particularly in formulating and expressing them effectively. A web-based questioning method is suggested to help students practice crafting and responding to questions, fostering confidence and better discussion management. These strategies collectively aim to enhance students' presentation skills and promote autonomous learning.

Limitation of Study

This study focuses only on the perception of students in the informatics department who are projected to work in the information technology (IT) sector in one period of time. With the development of IT, the need for presentation skills can be very dynamic. Therefore, it will be necessary to do a longitudinal study that surveys the student's needs for several lengths of time. This is seen as essential to keep the learning strategies relevant to student's needs.

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