

Study on the Speaking Difficulties Among the Students: With special reference to the Higher National Diploma in English

¹M.Farwis, ²M.B Nowzath, ³MA.M.Jareeth

ABSTRACT

Oral presentation skills are considered one of the most important proficiencies needed for higher education and future careers. Thus, the context of the present study is limited to HND in English department students at ATI Sammanthurai. The study investigates only those difficulties that reflect challenges in speaking skills. This research is also restricted to the exploration of the perceptions of HND in English students of English departments of the ATI Sammanthurai. It is worth mentioning that the small participant size will denote that the findings of this study cannot be generalized and may not apply to other ATI. A five-point Likert Scale questionnaire was used and divided into three main sections: personal traits, oral presentation skills, and instructor and audience. Independent variables measured was students' Grade Point Average (GPA). In addition, a structured interview was carried out. Results showed students' perceptions of the difficulties they experienced at a medium level. However, significant differences in the results were found when students' GPAs was considered.

KEYWORDS: Oral presentation, EFL students, Oral assessment, College students' perceptions, Classroom oral assessment

I. INTRODUCTION

In the present context of the world, the importance of English is accepted and applied since it is the most common language spoken in majority of the world countries. English plays a crucial role in sectors like medicine, engineering, technology and education, which is the most significant area where Spoken as well as the written English is required. Ur (1996) considered speaking as the most important skill among four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) because people who know a language are referred to as speakers of that language. This indicates that using a language is more important than just knowing about it because 'there is no point knowing a lot about language if you can't use it' (Scrivener, 2005,). English is the 'Lingua Franca' of the world. With the technological revolution and e-learning system, the English Language has emerged as one of the world's most important tools of formal communication in the present cyber and digital age (Khan ,2011). English is the dominant language of commerce; it is a worldwide, intercultural, linguistic phenomenon (Graddol, 2006) . It is taught in a bewildering variety of situations. In many countries, it first appears in the primary curriculum, but in those and other countries where it continues to find entrances, most learners are still insufficiently competent in English use (Harmer, 2007). (Davies & Pearse ,1998) make it clear that the major goal of English language teaching should be to enhance learners' ability to use English effectively and accurately in communication. For language learning to take place, there are four conditions that should exist: the exposure, opportunities to use the language, motivation, and instruction. Learners need chances to say what they think or feel and to experiment in a supportive atmosphere using a language they have heard or seen without feeling threatened (Willis, 1996).

Statement of the Problem Speaking is considered a main language skill that students should improve, it has been widely noticed that the face many difficulties in speaking English even though that they have spent years studying English, but still they cannot speak it. This study aims to find out what speaking difficulties are encountered by HND in English students in Advance Technological Institute in Sammanthurai. It also aims to find out the main factors that contribute to the existence of these difficulties.

Literature Review Researchers and educationalists have been preoccupied lately trying to emphasize the role of oral presentation in students' academic careers, especially at undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Liow, 2008; Wolfe, 2008; Munby, 2011). The majority of those studies were devoted to ways of conducting proper oral presentations (e.g., Abu El Enein, 2011). Some studies, on the other hand, listed the benefits of oral presentation, such as helping instructors cater to students' learning styles, practicing speaking, providing students with a deep

understanding of the presentation topic, and providing independent, critical learning to facilitate cooperative learning and to introduce students to technology (Al-Issa & Al-Qubtan, 2010; Munby, 2011). Yet, other studies were concerned with listing the difficulties that students usually face in oral presentation, such as feeling nervous (Chuang, 2009; Abu El Enein, 2011 Alwi & Sidhu, 2013). One of the main difficulties reported facing students in oral presentation was anxiety or fear of speaking. Research has consistently revealed that anxiety can impede EFL students' production and achievement (Al-Nouh; Abdul-Kareem & Taqi, 2014). In addition, some studies investigated the reasons behind students' anxiety, such as lack of vocabulary (Subasi, 2010; Mazdayasna, 2012), while others proposed ways to overcome these difficulties, such as choosing a familiar topic and practicing a lot (e.g. Zappa-Hollman, 2007). In addition, a growing number of studies aimed to investigate the reasons behind students' low performance in oral presentations (Turner; Roberts; Heal & Wright, 2012; Akindele & Trennepohl, 2014). These can be grouped under three categories. First, personal traits such as shyness, fear of facing an audience, self-confidence, and physical appearance. Elliott and Chong (2004) found that students' personal traits were the reason behind their feelings of anxiety during oral presentation. Second, the audience and the instructor were believed to be main reasons for students' unwillingness to present (e.g., negative evaluations, hard questions, humiliating feedback, etc.) (Wolfe, 2008). Finally, lack of presentation skills were seen to play a crucial role in students' feelings of anxiety (e.g., researching, planning, organizing, practicing, and presenting) (Leichsenring, 2010). As seen above, although there are different factors that affect students' oral presentation, most of them stem from anxiety of speaking. In the next section, studies reporting the effect of the above factors on students' oral presentation are discussed.

Personal Traits Studies of oral assessment have occasionally noted the potentially inhibiting role of anxiety in affecting students' ability to perform (Joughin, 2007). To investigate the effect of personal traits on performance and specifically, to find out how students' status and familiarity with English language affect anxiety level, Elliot and Chong (2004) solicited the opinions of first-year university students in Australia and found that one third of the sample had a high or very high level of presentation anxiety. Two thirds of the students believed that their level of anxiety affected their performance. Interestingly, it was found that the level of anxiety was higher for international students. Not only undergraduate but also graduate students were reported being anxious during oral presentations. For example, Zappa-Hollman (2007) wanted to explore the discourse socialization of non- native graduate students in Canada while engaging in an academic oral presentation. It was found that students were shy and afraid to present in front of a large audience. Students feared oral presentation as it involved a number of skills.

Presentation Skills Lack of presentation skills was believed to be the second most important factor that causes difficulty in oral presentation. In a related study to explore the factors that influence students' oral presentations, Leichsenring (2010) reported that EFL undergraduate Japanese students want to speak better English and to lower their language anxiety. They worried about making mistakes, which resulted in their memorization of content. They also believed that presenting in English was difficult and reported problems with planning and preparing a presentation. Similarly, inadequate presentation skills result in poor performance. For example, Chuang (2011) tried to find out college non-English-major students' perceptions of oral language activities in which oral presentations played a major role. Students reported a preference for reading from notes, a lack of audience or teacher feedback to guide them in their presentations, the inability to choose their own topics, poor vocabulary, and inadequate presentation skills. To further understand students' competence in oral presentation, there is a need to compare their competence with their performance. For example, Alwi and Sidhu (2013) wanted to compare Malaysian faculty-degree students' evaluations of their levels of competence with their actual performance in oral presentations. Findings showed students perceived themselves better than how they were rated by the examination board. However, actual performances showed they had weaknesses in language and delivery skills.

Audience & Instructor Likewise, fear of facing the audience and the instructor was reported by most studies as the worst fear of all in oral presentations. And because learners are the best conveying their beliefs and feelings, researchers were particularly interested in finding out about learners' attitudes and perceptions towards oral presentations. To explore college students' attitudes towards oral presentations, Wolfe (2008) found students reporting audience reactions as an unpleasant experience in oral presentations as well as group presentations in which group members do not share the work equally. Wolfe ultimately concluded that fear of public speaking was rated as the worst fear for many students. Fear of public speaking might be the result of the culture of learning. Indeed, Lee (2009) reported graduate students having passive personalities as a result of a Korean learning culture that privileges silence and passivity. Difficulties reported were the inability to contact the professor's eyes and their classmates' reactions, which caused them to panic and forget their material. Driven by concerns about students' academic success, the present study aims to solicit HND in English students' perceptions of the

difficulties in oral presentations as a form of assessment. It intends to look at the factors that affect students' oral presentation from three perspectives: personal traits, oral presentation skills, audience and instructor. To this end, the following research question was addressed: What are the Main Speaking difficulties of HND in English Students in ATI Sammanthurai?

II. METHOD

In this study the quantitative methodology adopted. This study was carried out in Advance Technological Institute in Sammanthurai. The sample was drawn from the HND in English Students of this ATI

Results and analysis: Students' Questionnaire As indicated above, the first research question aimed to find out HND in English students' overall perceptions of the difficulties in oral presentation. Generally speaking, the findings indicate a medium level as shown in Table (1) below:

Table 1. General Means and Standard Deviations for ATI Students' Perceptions of the difficulties of Oral Presentation

Factors	M	SD
Personal Traits	2.52	.39
Oral Presentation Skills	2.38	.39
Audience & Instructor	2.47	.54

The means and standard deviations were established for students' perceptions of oral presentation according to Table 1. Results suggest students sometimes face difficulties during oral presentation. This is inconsistent with Chuang's study (2011) in which students perceived oral presentations to be poorly delivered, assessed, and received. The inconsistency can be explained by the fact that the Ministry of Education started lately to emphasize oral-presentation assessment in elementary and intermediate schools. Twice in a course pupils were told to prepare a topic chosen by the teacher of no more than five lines and either read or memorize and recite it. However, this assessment is not done regularly, pupils do not get proper feedback from the teacher, and memorization is encouraged. Hence, students are liable to face some difficulties that will be discussed below.

Personal Traits. Table 2 below reflects students' perceptions of the difficulties in oral presentation assessment in relation to personal traits. Although the mean reflects a medium level (M=2.88) as shown in statement 1, a large number of students (43%) said that they "Disagree" dislike oral presentations, followed by those who said "Strongly Disagree" (25%) and those who said "Agree" (27%). This is consistent with Zappa-Hollman's study (2007) in which students reported oral presentation as "daunting," involving a number of skills. Similarly, statement 2 showed nearly half the students (47%) reporting that they "Agree" feel anxious before an oral presentation exam (M=2.36) followed by 7% who said they "Strongly Disagree" do. This is also supported by most studies reporting students feeling anxious before an oral presentation (Vitasari et al., 2010; Abu El-Enein, 2011; Radzuan & Kaur, 2011).

No.	Statement	M	SD	Rank
1	I don't like the idea of oral presentations.	2.88	.84	Medium
2	I like to do an oral presentation with a group.	1.74	.59	Low
3	I feel very anxious before an oral presentation exam.	2.36	.78	Medium
4	I find an oral presentation exam difficult because I have low Self-confidence.	2.90	.87	Medium
5	I feel embarrassed when I do an oral presentation in English.	2.35	0.95	Medium
6	I'm worried because of my low English-speaking ability.	2.36	.97	Medium
7	On presentation day I skip class.	3.31	.90	High

Indeed, a large number of students (45%) reported "Agree" bringing their written notes with them during their oral presentation, even if well-prepared. It seems that notes make students feel more secure and reduce their anxiety. Similarly, Chuang (2011) noted that students in his study reported the need for note cards; otherwise, the

presentation was impossible. Chuang (2009) believed that anxiety affects cognitive abilities and thus students learned less and were unable to display what they had learned. Nevertheless, he recommended presentations without notes to be more effective for improving students' oral ability. Thus, it behooves instructors to help their students minimize the use of notes during presentations.

No.	Statement	M	SD	Rank
8	I bring notes with me during my oral presentation even if I am well prepared.	2.09	.90	Medium
9	I feel worried even if I have prepared well beforehand.	2.40	.80	Medium
10	When I start my oral presentation, I forget everything I wanted to say.	2.56	.83	Medium
11	I feel my peers speak English better than me.	2.20	.84	Medium
12	I hate oral presentations because of a past negative experience.	2.91	0.87	Medium
13	I feel shy during oral presentations.	2.44	.88	Medium
14	I'm afraid of failure in oral presentations.	2.80	.84	Medium

Oral Presentation Skills The second main factor suggested to have an impact on participants' oral presentation is presentation skills. As seen from Table 3 below, statement 15 shows a large number of students (49%) feel the need to read from notes during oral presentations. This is in line with previous research in which participants were found reading from notes and not making eye contact (Chuang, 2011). Interestingly, Zappa-Hollman (2007) found that non-native speakers of English were used to reading aloud from their notes during their oral presentation. This also supports the answers to statement 8, for which most participants reported "Agree" bringing their written notes, even if well-prepared. A very interesting finding is for statement 17, for which more than half of the participants (57%) reported the need to see a peer's presentation before doing their own. This might suggest unfamiliarity with oral presentation and the need for modeling this activity. Zappa-Hollman (2007) refers to modeling as a strategy used in oral presentations during which some students prefer to witness a peer presentation before doing their own. When it comes to using technology, however, most participants (43%) strongly believe that they are knowledgeable. Indeed, given the first author's experience as an instructor at the CBE, students have good technological skills.

No.	Statement	M	SD	Rank
15	I need to read from my notes during oral presentations.	2.35	.84	Medium
16	I find it difficult to abide by the time constraints of the presentation.	.254	.84	Medium
17	I prefer to see someone's presentation before starting my own.	2.13	.79	Medium
18	I don't know how to use technology in my oral presentation.	2.90	.89	Medium
19	Not knowing how to do an oral presentation is the reason behind my low performance.	2.63	.82	Medium
20	I care about grammar more than fluency in oral presentation.	1.95	.78	Low
21	During oral presentation, I think in Arabic then translate it into English.	2.24	.89	Medium

Additionally, almost half the students (45%) believe that the conversation course is not enough to improve their speaking skill (statement 22) and 35% of them believe as well as same as 35% not believe that shortage of oral-skills courses is the reason behind their low performance. Unfortunately, there are no courses tailored for the development of oral presentation skills. Students acquire presentation skills by performing them in other courses. Other difficulties reported by students were shortage of vocabulary knowledge (statement 24), which is supported by the answers to statement 21, for which students translate from Tamil to English, a task that eventually affects their oral fluency (statement 25). This is further supported by statement 20 responses, for which students reported focusing on grammar at the expense of fluency.

No.	Statement	M	SD	Rank
22	The conversation course is not enough to improve my speaking skill.	2.37	.88	Medium
23	Not having courses in oral presentation is the reason behind my low performance.	2.57	.92	Medium
24	I find it hard to find the suitable word to express my meaning.	2.34	.88	Medium
25	I have a problem with oral fluency and pronunciation during oral presentation.	2.35	.76	Medium
26	I prefer to be assessed by written exams rather than oral presentations.	2.16	.75	Medium
27	I prefer to memorize the topic of the oral presentation rather than understand it.	2.27	.76	Medium
28	The difficulty of the topic is the reason behind my low performance in oral presentation.	2.61	0.80	Medium
29	I find it difficult to organize my ideas logically during oral presentation.	2.36	.81	Medium

Audience / Instructor To support the fact that students experience some difficulties in oral presentations, most students (41%) reported feeling afraid to present in front of an audience (statement 30). These findings echo with Alwi and Sidhu's (2013) reporting that students barely make eye contact with the audience. Similarly, Joughin (2007) observed students feeling anxious when speaking English in front of their peers. Also, a large number of students (40%) reported that when late students enter the classroom or talk to each other, it confuses them during oral presentation. As to instructor's presence, 43% of the students said that the instructor's interrupting of their presentations with questions and criticism affects their performance (statement 34). This is consistent with Radzuan and Kaur's study (2011) in which students reported the evaluation panel's attacking them with difficult questions and criticism and interrupting them to make comments. In addition, many students (47%) felt anxious when their instructors were attending to their language and others said they "Agree" try to avoid looking at the instructor's eyes during oral presentation. What is more, a high percentage of students (47) (M=2.44) reported "Agree" the fear of receiving unfair grades for their presentations.

No.	Statement	M	SD	Rank
30	I feel frightened when a lot of people are watching me.	2.37	.95	Medium
31	Students' reactions affect my performance in the oral presentation.	2.27	.85	Medium
32	I worry that students will laugh at me when I speak English.	2.54	1.01	Medium
33	When late students enter class or talk to each other during oral presentation, I lose my ideas.	2.40	.94	High
34	The instructor's interruption with questions or criticism affects my performance.	2.44	.81	Medium
35	I feel anxious because the instructor is watching my language.	2.31	.84	Medium
36	I try to avoid the instructor's eyes during oral presentation.	2.77	.89	Medium
37	I'm afraid that I would get an unfair grade for my oral presentation.	2.44	.78	High
38	I don't get useful feedback from the instructor after the oral presentation.	2.75	.99	Medium

III. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of the study This research is undertaken by the researcher in 100 students selected as sample for this research from HND in English Students at ATI Sammanthurai. This research is carried out with a structured Questionnaire. The researcher made plenty of efforts in approaching appropriate respondents to collect needed

and relative data. The researcher collected data from 100 students of both boys and girls from HND in English students of that particular ATI. The collected data were fed into the SPSS for analyzing the data with statistical methods. The data analyzed with many statistical tools to derive findings for the following objectives; to evaluate the identify the Main Speaking difficulties of HND in English Students and to find out the factors influencing HND in English students on Spoken English.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

To sum up, results indicate that students experience difficulties with their oral presentation at a medium level. Although the means show a medium level, students still experience a number of difficulties that are mostly related to “personal traits,” including students’ fear of evaluation, avoidance of the instructor’s eyes, and forgetting what they want to say. Significant differences were found among students in their GPAs. Indeed, students see “personal traits” as the most important factor affecting their performances, while teachers see “oral presentation skills” as the most important factor. Students further acknowledge other difficulties such as lack of oral presentation courses, technology-based equipment, a suitable environment, and ample time allowed for the presentation.

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