

Factors undergraduate students in a Thai university perceive as difficulties in performing English presentation

Pimpaporn Dechvijankit

School of Architecture and Design
King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi

Sutharat Puangsing

School of Architecture and Design
King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi

ABSTRACT

Presentation skill or the ability to present in English is one of the skills undergraduate students in Thailand, especially those in international programs, are expected to effectively perform to meet the expectations of graduate users. However, it is undeniable the process of developing the spoken skill in English is often considered difficult for Thai students to cope with as of many factors, both intrinsic and extrinsic (The state Islamic Institute of Tulungagung, 2014). This study examines the factors which students perceive as difficulties when they perform presentations in English. It also investigates whether their perceived difficulties have changed after they have finished performing each presentation. The research employed a quantitative method to obtain data for the study. 62 respondents consisting of first year students from an international school of a state university in Bangkok answered a questionnaire on attitude and perception regarding their presentation in English. Data were then collected and analyzed through descriptive statistics. Findings and implications of the study are further discussed.

Keywords: presentation skill, speaking skill, difficulties in English speaking, perceptions towards English Speaking

INTRODUCTION

English is globally taught as a general subject in all educational levels. A number of courses are designed and taught to enhance students' four key skills in English, including speaking skill. Several forms of speaking activities are introduced and practised, and one of which is oral presentation. However, many EFL learners find that giving a presentation in English is very challenging with several difficulties (Jackson & Latané, 1981; Morita, 2000; Al-Nouh, Abdul-Kareem & Taqi (2015). According to Imaniah (2018), students have to deal with a dual task:

communicating ideas using foreign language when performing oral presentations. To be able to deliver effective presentations, speakers need to be trained, and teachers play an important role for training. For this reason, it is important that language teachers understand the skills involved in giving presentations, and the potential difficulties oral presentations can present for second language learners (Brooks & Wilson, 2014).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. What are the factors that students perceive as difficulties when they perform presentations?
2. Has their perception on difficulties changed after they finish each presentation?

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The subjects of this study were 62 first year undergraduate students of the School of Architecture and Design, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) who enrolled in the course "LNG 105 Academic English for International Students". Their English proficiency levels ranged from intermediate to upper intermediate (according to their standardized test scores submitted to the School).

The Course

LNG 105 Academic English for International Students is one of compulsory courses for students who study in international programs of KMUTT. It aims at developing learners' four skills of English language including reading, writing, listening and speaking. Oral presentation is one focus of speaking aspect. To help students develop this skill, the course instructors educate them on how to give effective presentations as well as evaluate and provide comments on their presentation performances. Throughout the academic semester the students are required to perform three presentations with three different objectives: 1) to sell ideas (pair work), 2) to educate (group work), and 3) to inspire (individual work).

Instruments

The main instrument used for collecting data in this survey was questionnaires. The questionnaires were created online using Google Forms online survey tool and pretested on another group of students who also studied LNG 105. The questionnaires consisted of 6 items for the first presentation and 7 items for the second and third presentations as the tasks were slightly different, and the researchers needed more information in order to compare the results of the

three presentations. These items explored the following aspects of the students when performing presentations: students' preparation for presentations, difficulties of giving presentations in English, speakers' self-evaluation, and improvement of their speaking skills. Mixed types of questions, namely open-ended, multiple choice, and rating scale were employed in the questionnaires.

Procedure

The instructors assigned presentation tasks two weeks prior to the presentation schedules (the schedules for each presentation had already been fixed and provided in the LNG 105 course syllabus) so that the students had enough time to prepare. Time allocated for each presentation was different. The pair and individual presentations were given five to eight minutes while the group work had approximately ten to fifteen minutes.

After finishing their presentation each time, the students were evaluated by their instructors and received feedbacks regarding their performances. Finally, they were asked to complete the online questionnaires in class.

Data analysis

	Difficulties perceived	1 st presentation		2 nd presentation		3 rd presentation	
		no. of respondent	percentage	no. of respondent	percentage	no. of respondent	percentage
A	Failure to remember some parts of speaking content	6	9.68	8	12.90	10	16.13
B	Lack of English speaking skills e.g. pronunciation and fluency	10	16.13	11	17.74	9	14.52
C	Nervousness when performing presentation in classroom environment	7	11.29	6	9.68	4	6.45
D	Failure to use proper body language e.g. eye contact, hand gesture, body movement during presentation	5	8.06	4	6.45	4	6.45
E	Failure to remember some parts of speaking content, Nervousness when performing presentation in classroom environment	2	3.23	8	12.90	10	16.13
F	Failure to remember some parts of speaking content, Lack of English speaking skills e.g. pronunciation and fluency,	6	9.68	6	9.68	5	8.06
G	Failure to remember some parts of speaking content, Failure to use proper body language e.g. eye contact, hand gesture, body movement during presentation	1	1.61	2	3.23	4	6.45
H	Lack of English speaking skills e.g. pronunciation and fluency, Nervousness when performing presentation in classroom environment	7	11.29	7	11.29	1	1.61
I	Nervousness when performing presentation in classroom environment, Failure to use proper body language e.g. eye contact, hand gesture, body movement during presentation	2	3.23	2	3.23	3	4.84
J	Failure to remember some parts of speaking content, Lack of English speaking skills e.g. pronunciation and fluency, Nervousness when performing presentation in classroom environment	9	14.52	4	6.45	6	9.68

K	Failure to remember some parts of speaking content, Lack of English speaking skills e.g. pronunciation and fluency, Nervousness when performing presentation in classroom environment, Failure to use proper body language e.g. eye contact, hand gesture, body movement during presentation	7	11.29	4	6.45	6	9.68
TOTAL		62	100	62	100	62	100

The analysis of the data focused on the responses to the question “In your opinion, what are the difficulties of performing a presentation?” in order to answer the research questions.

The data obtained from this item were classified into eleven groups based on the types of perceived difficulty. The questionnaire results of all three presentations were also compared to see whether the students’ perception on difficulties had changed. The data from the open-ended questions were used to support the results of the quantitative data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Difficulties perceived by students when they performed 3 presentations in English

Table 1 shows that:

in the first presentation (pair work), major factors students perceived as difficulties during performing their presentation were (B) Lack of English speaking skills (10 respondents, 16.13%) and (J) a combination of Failure to remember some parts of speaking content, Lack of English speaking skills, and Nervousness when performing presentation in classroom environment (9 respondents, 14.52%).

In the second presentation (group work), they stated major factors of difficulties as (B) Lack of English speaking skills (11 respondents, 17.74%) and (A) Failure to remember some parts of speaking content (8 respondents, 12.90%), and (E) a combination of Failure to remember some parts of speaking content and Nervousness when performing presentation in classroom environment (8 respondents, 12.90%).

In the third presentation (individual work), 10 students (16.13%) stated their difficulty factor was (A) Failure to remember some parts of speaking content. In the meantime, another 10 students (16.13%) mentioned (E) a combination of Failure to remember some parts of speaking content and Nervousness when performing presentation in classroom environment as their major difficulty.

It is clearly seen that their perceived difficulties changed after each finished presentation. Factors (B) Lack of English speaking skills and (c) Nervousness when performing presentation in classroom environment—which were as well stated in combinations (H) and (J)—were less mentioned as difficulties in the third presentation, compared to the first and second. On the other hand, factor (A) Failure to remember some parts of speaking content—which was as well

stated in combination (E)—was more mentioned as their difficulty after each presentation was performed.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

1. The most common difficulty perceived by this group of students in their first and second presentations is the lack of English speaking skills. This may be due to the fact that they were first year students with prior limited exposure to speaking English outside classroom before studying in this School. However, after finishing the third presentation at the end of the class, they seemed to feel more competent and able to develop their speaking skills in English presentation.

2. The most common difficulty perceived by this group of students in their third presentation is the failure to remember some parts of speaking content. One possible explanation is that this was an individual task, containing more content for each presenter than two previous presentations. Another likely reason is they had not prepared well enough since they tended to focus more on their core subjects i.e. architecture and design subjects, especially at the end of the semester. The study of Kho & Leong (2015) revealed that students seemed to spend more time and effort on subjects they perceived more important and more challenging.

3. From the results and discussions, the research questions have been answered with above evidence. In general, students considered failure to remember speaking content and lack of English speaking skills their most common difficulties when performing presentation in English and these perceived factors had changed after three presentations were finished. It is suggested that students should be encouraged by the teachers and School to increase the awareness of their practice and preparation before performing each presentation as it is a very essential skill, academically and professionally for students in 21st century.

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