



Exploring the Challenges Faced by English Major Students in Delivering Oral Presentations at Kabul University

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Abstract

In today's academic environment, oral presentations are a challenge for many students; however, delivering them serves as a valuable communication skill. Several factors contribute to the student's poor performance. Therefore, this study aims to explore the challenges faced by English major students in delivering oral presentations at Kabul University, as well as to explore the strategies they use to improve their skills and the role of lecturers in developing these abilities. Through a descriptive quantitative research design, a five-point Likert-scale survey questionnaire was administered to 30 English major students at Kabul University, Afghanistan, in the Language and Literature Faculty, Department of English. Results revealed that students struggle mostly with limited preparation time, presentation anxiety, and discomfort with getting an unjust grade. Additionally, students employed several strategies to enhance their oral presentation skills, with the most commonly reported being boosting their confidence, observing other presentations, incorporating visual aids, and anticipating potential questions. Instructors played a crucial role in enhancing these skills by creating a supportive learning environment, ensuring sufficient preparation time, and providing students with grading rubrics. The study provides recommendations for students and teachers to develop strategies for improved communication and presentation skills.

Keywords: Anxiety, Challenges, Lecturers' roles, Oral presentation, Strategies.

Introduction

One of the most sought-after graduate employability skills is oral communication, which is a key component in ensuring learning standards (Jackson, 2014). Presentations can be used as a teaching technique. One of the techniques and activities that could be effective for English as a foreign language student and enhance their speaking skills is oral presentation (Farabi et al., 2017). Miles (2009) also noted that presentation skills are crucial for students seeking to enhance their communication and conversation abilities. Therefore, we can conclude that oral presentations can serve as a source of motivation and inspiration.

Hyland (2014) states that a range of requirements must be met for EFL learners to be able to speak in English. Language difficulties that students in English classes must overcome include inadequate vocabulary, poor pronunciation, and a lack of understanding of grammatical structures, according to Juhana's (2012) research. Joughin (2011) mentioned that oral presentation is a requirement for successful performance in various working environments and for effective communication in democratic societies.

One of the most important aspects of English in teaching and learning is speaking. Brown and Yule (1983) noted that speaking can be categorized into three distinct types: speaking as interaction, speaking as transaction, and speaking as performance. Each of these speech activities has its own unique characteristics and purposes. Speaking is also defined, according to Pollard (2008), as one of the hardest skills for students to acquire. Students struggle with building confidence, organizing their thoughts, and engaging their audience effectively, especially when it comes to oral communication or oral presentations.

An oral presentation is one activity that can be utilized to help students improve their speaking skills while learning English. They provide an opportunity for students to showcase their knowledge and allow teachers to assess their understanding (Tsang, 2020). It means that oral presentation is not just a practice of speaking, but an application of speaking skills. According to Alshare and Hindi (2004, p. 6), giving an oral presentation is considered "an important element in delivering positive learning experiences." A study by Grieve et al. (2021) showed that oral presentations cause social anxiety in most students (80%) from two UK colleges, which affects their learning and overall well-being. Some earlier researchers have examined students' worries related to speaking skills (Dansieh et al., 2021) and have identified elements connected with glossophobia, a high fear of public speaking among university students.

Student anxiety has received much attention in the field of foreign languages. DiBartolo and Molina (2010) stated that it helps students overcome their concerns about giving oral presentations. Based on preliminary observations, to present oneself in English fluently, a person must possess knowledge of the language and the ability to process information in their mind when responding to the person they are speaking with (Harmer, 2001). Students also tend to experience fear or anxiety, less confidence, a lack of preparation, fear of being judged, and making mistakes. The reasons that might cause fear of public speaking are limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, and glossophobia (an intense fear of public speaking) (Russell & Topham, 2012). There is evidence to support the theory that some students in academic contexts have considerable levels of social anxiety, according to a recent study by Porhola et al. (2019). Another study found that learners' performance may suffer as a result of foreign language anxiety (Saito & Samimy, 1996). Thus, it can be said that language anxiety affects students' performance, and those who are able to manage their fear will perform well when speaking with others.

The focus of this research is the challenges of oral delivery at the Language and Literature Faculty, Department of English. Their background plays a role in the participant recruitment process. Some researchers have noted that EFL students often face difficulties when communicating through spoken language. Various studies have been conducted (Grieve et al., 2021; Arlan et al., 2022; Sivadjati, 2016) to investigate the challenges associated with oral delivery. While the research employed a sample of participants from English Language Education, specifically junior and senior English students, this study highlights the research gap between English major students and their ability to deliver oral

presentations at Kabul University. Afghanistan's cultural, linguistic, and technological context presents unique challenges and opportunities.

Girard et al. (2011) found that doing oral presentations during language lessons in the classroom can lead to increased class attention and participation, a stronger focus and interest in studying, and significant improvements in students' communication and presentation skills. King (2002) stated that oral presentations serve as a bridge between language study and language usage, requiring learners to employ all four language skills naturally, and are thought to help learners become enthusiastic and independent.

Oral presentations begin with speaking exercises based on real-life scenarios, which provide learners with authentic opportunities to use language meaningfully. Such presentations prepare students for job interviews, which are vital for their future careers (Zivkovich, 2014).

Despite the recognized importance of oral presentations, several studies have shown that learners often face challenges in developing these skills in various contexts. However, in Afghanistan, there is a serious lack of research exploring the difficulties students encounter in delivering oral presentations. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap and contribute to the growing body of literature on the subject.

The study focuses on three key research questions:

1. What challenges do students encounter when delivering oral presentations?
2. What strategies do learners use to enhance their fluency and overall presentation effectiveness?
3. What role do teachers play in improving students' oral presentation skills?

Material and Method

The aim of this research is to investigate the challenges faced by English major students at Kabul University in delivering oral presentations, strategies for improving these skills, and the role of lecturers in enhancing students' presentation abilities. It also examines how these challenges influence students' confidence, fluency, and overall presentation effectiveness.

In this research, the researcher used a descriptive quantitative survey approach. The data were collected through a questionnaire. The descriptive survey method was selected for its effectiveness in describing the characteristics of a population based on data collection from a sample (Creswell, 2014; Sukamolson, 2007).

Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of 70 junior and senior students from the English Department at Kabul University. From this population, the questionnaire was given to a sample of 30 students. The choice of a 30-participant sample is supported by empirical methodological guidance in educational and EFL research. Empirical studies in educational research have suggested that a median sample size of approximately 30 participants is commonly used in survey-based studies when larger probabilistic sampling is infeasible, and it represents a practical minimum threshold for descriptive survey research in educational contexts (Besekar et al., 2024). All participants in this research were male, and the majority were between 18 and 25 years old; this gender distribution corresponds to the specific characteristics of the research context in Afghanistan and is a limitation of the current study. Student selection was based on convenience sampling, as

the junior (3rd year) and senior (4th year) classes of the English Department offered easy access to students and allowed for time constraints to be accommodated. Guidance for research designs that use convenience samples emphasises transparent justification of sample size and how it relates to the analytical objectives and population characteristics, especially in descriptive quantitative research where fully random sampling may not be possible (Mursa et al., 2025). In addition, a simple precision criterion was considered. For example, with a sample size of 30 from a small population of 70, the sample constitutes approximately 43% of the population, which significantly reduces sampling error and improves the accuracy of descriptive estimates relative to much smaller fractions (Gay, 2012). These students provided important data regarding the challenges faced by students..

Instrumentation

The data for this research were collected through a questionnaire that included closed-ended questions. This questionnaire was developed by Tareen et al. (2023), with minor adjustments made to align the study's objectives and context better. Since the instrument was adapted from a previously validated study, its content validity was initially established by the original authors through expert review. To ensure suitability for the present context, the adapted questionnaire was reviewed by two experts at the English department in linguistics and EFL instruction, and minor wording revisions were made accordingly.

For conducting this research, a quantitative approach was employed to collect and analyze the data, which was chosen based on the research objectives. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: the first section collected demographic details, and the second section had three parts. The second section comprised 14 items assessing students' challenges in oral presentations, 10 items examining strategies for improving presentation skills, and 8 items evaluating the lecturer's role in enhancing oral presentation abilities. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Somewhat Agree, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly Agree.

To examine the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of students who were not included in the main study. The internal consistency of the instrument was measured using Cronbach's alpha, and the results indicated an acceptable level of reliability ($\alpha > 0.81$), confirming that the questionnaire items were consistent and reliable for data collection. Participants completed the questionnaires individually during class, with the researcher distributing them after obtaining permission from the instructors.

Data Collection Procedures

Based on the quantitative approach, the researcher used a questionnaire comprising 32 closed-ended questions. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the English Department, and a consent letter was shared with voluntary participants. The questionnaire was clearly explained before being distributed to two classes in the English Department for data collection.

Limitations of This Study

This study has some limitations. Firstly, the participants in this study come from only one department. In addition, there were time constraints. The researcher collected data from the questionnaire to get information from the respondents. The researcher may not gain

deeper insight or greater detail into the oral presentation experiences faced by the respondents.

Data Analysis

In this research, the data were analyzed through Microsoft Excel 2013. After data collection, all completed questionnaires were first screened to ensure completeness and accuracy. The responses were then coded numerically according to the five-point Likert scale, with values ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Descriptive statistics were employed to calculate the mean score and standard deviation. The obtained mean scores were interpreted as follows (Table 1):

Table 1. Interpretation of mean range

Rank	Interpretation
4.00–5.00	High
3.00–4.00	Moderate
2.00–3.00	Low

Findings

Demographics

Table 2 below presents the demographic characteristics of the study's respondents. In terms of gender, all 30 respondents of this study are male participants. The results show that almost 93.3% of participants are between 18 and 25 years old, and only 6.6% of them are between 25 and 28 years old. This distribution displays the majority of undergraduate youth participants.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Gender	Male	30	100	100
	Female	0	0	0
	Total	30	100	100
Age	18-25	28	93.33	93.33
	25-28	2	6.67	6.67
	Total	30	100	100
Class	Junior	13	43.33	43.33
	Senior	17	56.67	56.67
	Total	30	100	100
Shift	Morning	30	100	100
	Afternoon	0	0	0
	Night	0	0	0
	Total	30	100	100

Regarding academic standing, the sample is nearly evenly divided between juniors (3rd year) and seniors (4th year), with 43.3% and 56.6%, respectively. All participants in this study are day shift class students.

Challenges in Delivering an Oral Presentation

The data in Table 3 highlight students' perceptions and challenges regarding oral presentations. The results reveal that students feel moderately confident when they have adequately prepared for the presentation (M = 3.90, SD = 1.49), suggesting that students gain confidence through preparation. Conversely, students are not moderately concerned about maintaining eye contact with the audience during an oral presentation (M = 3.07, SD = 1.85), indicating a moderate level of agreement, though responses varied across participants.

Table 3. Challenges related to oral presentation

	Statement	M	SD
1.	I take pleasure in delivering oral presentations due to my proficiency in them.	3.63	1.30
2.	I consider presentations straightforward because of my high level of self-assurance.	3.17	1.92
3.	Anticipating my turn to speak fills me with anxiety.	2.90	1.62
4.	Despite meticulous preparation, I often draw a blank during my delivery.	3.03	1.70
5.	Thorough preparation instills a sense of assurance in me prior to presenting.	3.90	1.49
6.	Interruptions from the instructor, such as queries or comments, hinder my delivery.	3.37	1.04
7.	I dread the possibility of my instructors highlighting my errors mid-presentation.	3.03	1.71
8.	I feel at ease delivering a presentation under the teacher's assessment.	3.43	1.07
9.	I have no apprehension regarding receiving an unfair evaluation for my presentation.	2.77	1.45
10.	My confidence holds steady regardless of a large audience observing me.	3.30	1.02
11.	Maintaining visual engagement with the listeners does not trouble me in oral presentations.	3.07	1.85
12.	I relish the experience of peer evaluation in a classroom setting.	3.47	1.12
13.	I can articulate my thoughts with clarity and precision while presenting.	3.70	1.33
14.	I successfully organize my concepts in a coherent manner during presentations.	3.60	1.27

Additionally, students become nervous when they know they are the next one to present ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.62$), reflecting prevalent pre-presentation anxiety, with noticeable differences in intensity among students. Students are not concerned about receiving an unjust grade for their presentation, which is the lowest ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.45$). This suggests that most students feel uneasy about receiving an unfair grade, while also showing diverse perspectives on this issue.

Strategies in Delivering Oral Presentations

The data in Table 4 highlight varying levels of agreement among students regarding strategies for improving oral presentations.

The results also reveal students need to boost their confidence in order to present effectively ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.90$), which indicates strong agreement that confidence-building is a valuable strategy, albeit with varied levels of emphasis among students. Similarly, students need to pay more attention to sound and pronunciation of the language ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.90$), showing broad agreement on the significance of pronunciation skills, though perceptions differ in strength. Another strategy students need to use is observing other presentations to enhance their own ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.67$), which indicates this is widely considered useful, with diverse opinions on its importance.

Table 4. Strategies for improving oral presentation

	Statement	M	SD
1.	I maintain keen focus on the reactions and engagement of my listeners.	3.63	1.35
2.	I engage in comprehensive preparation prior to conducting any presentation.	3.97	1.59
3.	I jot down concise cues to serve as aids, preventing reliance on verbatim scripts.	3.40	1.17
4.	I practice repeatedly to shift emphasis toward the audience rather than my written aids.	3.50	1.10
5.	I foresee possible inquiries and rehearse appropriate replies in advance.	3.30	1.93
6.	Enhancing my self-assurance is essential for delivering compelling presentations.	4.33	1.90
7.	I must devote greater effort to mastering the phonetics and articulation of the language.	4.33	1.90
8.	I review peers' deliveries to refine and improve my personal approach.	4.00	1.67
9.	Incorporating body language and sustaining direct visual connection with viewers is crucial for me.	3.93	1.56
10.	Designing impactful visual aids and allocating time judiciously are areas I need to strengthen.	4.27	1.83

Students also agree that they need to create effective slides and manage their time efficiently ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.83$), showing broad recognition of the value of quality visuals and time management, again with variation in responses. Students anticipate potential questions and practice their responses ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.93$), suggesting moderate

agreement and implying that while some students recognize the importance of anticipating audience questions, this practice is not universally adopted.

Lecturer's Role in Delivering Oral Presentation

The data in Table 5 illustrate varying levels of agreement regarding the lecturer's role in enhancing oral presentation skills.

Students reveal that the lecturer should make learning enjoyable and encourage students (M = 4.37, SD = 1.45), emphasizing the importance of a supportive and engaging learning environment. Similarly, the lecturer should allow students enough time to prepare effectively (M = 4.30, SD = 1.43), reflecting strong support for adequate preparation time, with varied levels of emphasis. The lecturer should permit students to choose their own topics to reduce anxiety (M = 4.27, SD = 1.40), indicating that this strategy is generally agreed upon as a way to alleviate presentation-related stress, albeit to different extents.

Table 5. The lecturer's role in improving oral presentation

Statement	M	SD
1. Instructors ought to grant learners sufficient duration for thorough preparation.	4.30	1.43
2. Faculty members should foster an engaging learning atmosphere and motivate participants.	4.37	1.45
3. Teachers need to supply EFL learners with evaluation criteria in advance of their talks.	3.77	1.90
4. Lecturers should incorporate footage of proficient orators to aid in refining students' delivery techniques.	4.00	1.09
5. The instructor must offer precise and constructive comments following each delivery.	4.10	1.18
6. Professors should promote greater encouragement and support among fellow students.	4.00	1.14
7. Educators ought to let pupils select their subjects freely to alleviate apprehension.	4.27	1.40
8. The instructor should design a specialized curriculum aimed at improving spoken presentation proficiencies for EFL learners.	4.23	1.32

The lecturer should provide EFL students with grading rubrics before their presentations. The lowest mean (M = 3.77, SD = 1.90) still reflects overall agreement that this strategy can help alleviate presentation-related disquiet, while also indicating diverse views on its importance.

Discussion

The aim was to explore the challenges faced by English major students at Kabul University in delivering oral presentations, the strategies they use to improve their skills, and the role of lecturers in developing these skills. In relation to the initial research question, the analysis reveals that students' confidence in oral presentations is strongly shaped by their level of preparation, while evaluative pressures and fear of negative judgment remain significant sources of anxiety. The findings indicate that learners exhibit markedly elevated assurance when they have engaged in comprehensive readiness, suggesting that preparation plays a central role in reducing uncertainty and enhancing perceived competence. At the same time, a pronounced unease with evaluative processes emerged, particularly concerning the prospect of an inequitable assessment. Participants also expressed apprehension that instructors might highlight their linguistic errors during presentations, alongside fears of receiving lower grades or facing ridicule from peers. Collectively, these findings suggest that although preparation strengthens self-assurance, concerns related to assessment and social evaluation continue to undermine students' confidence. These findings correspond with Leichsenring's (2010) identification of apprehensions surrounding the structuring and readiness of presentations, coupled with the inherent challenges of articulating in English. Similarly, Zainuddin and Selamat (2012) observed that learners may experience disorientation due to difficulties in grasping the structural framework and content of presentations. Joughin's (2007) examination of oral assessment further supports the present results by highlighting the constraining influence of evaluation-related anxiety on students' performance.

With respect to the second research question, the study demonstrates that students prioritize psychological readiness and linguistic competence as key strategies for improving their oral presentation performance. Elevating self-assurance emerges as the most preferred approach, indicating that students perceive confidence as fundamental to effective delivery. Participants also emphasized the importance of strengthening pronunciation and overall language proficiency, alongside engaging in repeated practice, observing peer presentations, and designing effective visual aids while managing time efficiently. These findings suggest that students adopt a combination of cognitive, linguistic, and technical strategies to enhance their presentation skills. This preference for confidence aligns with Hadjikotaeva's (2015) assertion that presenters must project conviction and intentionality. The emphasis on pronunciation and fluency is consistent with Juhana (2012) and Tuan and Mai (2015), who identified persistent phonological, syntactic, and lexical challenges among EFL learners. Likewise, Foppoli (2009) noted that difficulties in sentence structure, limited vocabulary, and inaccurate pronunciation remain common barriers in oral communication. The students' focus on visual aids and time management corresponds with Lambert (2008) and Emden and Becker (2004), who highlighted the role of visual support in reducing speaker anxiety and facilitating clearer communication.

Regarding the third research question, the findings indicate that students place substantial importance on a supportive and engaging instructional environment. Participants strongly valued lecturers who foster motivation and create an encouraging classroom atmosphere. They also emphasized the need for sufficient preparation time before presentations and expressed a preference for selecting their own topics to reduce anxiety. The comparatively

lower emphasis placed on the provision of grading rubrics suggests that while students recognize their usefulness, they prioritize emotional support, autonomy, and preparation time more highly. These findings align with Al-Issa and Al-Qubtan (2010) and Williyam (2019), who argued that traditional lecture-centered approaches provide limited opportunities for authentic oral practice. Thornbury (2005) similarly contended that time constraints intensify the inherent difficulties of oral presentation tasks. Furthermore, Hadjikotaeva (2015) and Nguyen (2016) observed that familiarity with presentation topics enhances both speaker confidence and audience engagement, reinforcing the present study's finding that topic choice plays a crucial role in reducing student anxiety.

Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrate that learners encounter diverse impediments and adopt an array of tactics to improve their presentation skills. Thorough preparation stands out as vital for elevating self-assurance and decreasing anxiety. Yet, receiving an unjust grade remains a significant concern. Students strategically prefer boosting confidence, paying attention to sounds and pronunciation, observing other presentations, and focusing on visual aids to enhance their presentation skills. These results highlight crucial roles in skill development and effective presentation methods. In terms of the instructor's contributions, students emphasize the importance of a supportive environment, sufficient preparation time, and the ability to choose their topic as key elements in enhancing their oral presentations. This shows their expectation for useful conditions and crucial support from teachers to improve their presentation abilities. The findings provide valuable insights into the challenges, strategies, and expectations that students have regarding the role of their instructors. They emphasize the importance of preparation, boosting confidence, a supportive learning environment, and enhancing skills. These insights can inform future educational strategies to better support and meet the diverse needs of students at various stages of their academic development.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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