

## **Impediments to Delivering Oral Presentations in English among Malaysian ESP Undergraduates**

**Abdelmadjid Benraghda\***, **Noor Raha Mohd Radzuan<sup>2</sup>**, **Zuraina Ali<sup>3</sup>**

Centre for Modern Languages & Human Sciences,  
Universiti Malaysia Pahang, Malaysia  
Lebuhraya Tun Razak, 26300 Kuantan, Pahang, MALAYSIA.

\*Email: [engmadjid@gmail.com](mailto:engmadjid@gmail.com)

Email<sup>2</sup>: [nraha@ump.edu.my](mailto:nraha@ump.edu.my),

Email<sup>3</sup>: [zuraina@ump.edu.my](mailto:zuraina@ump.edu.my)

### **Abstract:**

A common issue faced by many undergraduates in the classroom is the requirement to deliver oral presentations in English. The current study investigates local and international undergraduates' attitudes towards oral English presentations in class. Then, the correlation is examined between the undergraduates' attitudes and their performance scores in oral presentation in English. Moreover, this study tries to shed some light on the problems hindering undergraduates in delivering oral presentation in the classrooms. Questionnaire and Semi-structured interviews were conducted with undergraduates at the Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP), Malaysia. The results show that the undergraduates possess a positive attitude towards oral English presentations. Additionally, a positive correlation is found between the students' attitudes and their scores in oral presentation. The findings of the semi-structured interviews reveal a number of impediments exist in presenting orally in English. These hindrances include anxiety, poor English language proficiency and classroom atmosphere. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the nature of the undergraduates' attitudes with regards to their oral performances in tertiary academic and professional spheres.

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**Keywords:** **Attitude, English language, impediments, and oral presentation.**

### **Introduction**

Students in various academic contexts are required to be good communicators in English because with the global expansion of English the demand for good English communication skills has increased (Hashemi, 2011). The essential goal of learning English is to be a good communicator (Mai, 2011). English is taught as a second language (ESL) in many countries such as Malaysia, India and many other countries. However, students might experience negative attitude when

communicating in English (Tanveer, 2007). Theorists and researchers argue that many learners in Second Language classes are more anxious compared to any other classes (McIntyre & Gardner, 1989) and this anxiety comes from speaking situation, particularly oral presentation (McIntyre & Gardner, 1994). This is considered as a major hindrance for teachers as well as students to overcome students' hindrances when they are assigned to deliver oral presentations.

On its part, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) focuses on reducing language difficulties of students (Tanveer, 2007). This approach lays emphasis on group work presentations as a way to decrease language anxiety and possess positive attitude in delivering oral presentation in English. Despite its noble objective, on the contrary, it increases the demand on oral presentation among students in the modern language classes that may also increase their anxiety. It is viewed that students' attitude in the classroom must be considered very significant so as to develop and enhance students' oral presentation skills in English language (Tanveer, 2007).

Kassim and Ali (2010) conducted their study about the feedback from engineering industry in order to investigate the communicative skills at the workplace required by the industry. The findings revealed that special importance should be put on oral communication rather than written communication skills. Besides, fluency in the English language was viewed as an opportunity in the field of engineering in becoming a global engineer. Furthermore, Kassim and Ali's results (2010) indicated that the communicative events considered essential for engineers such as networking, teleconferencing for advice, contacts and presenting various ideas.

On his part, Kim (2006) pointed out that majority of Asian undergraduates who studied in the United States were concerned with performing oral presentation. Having oral presentation skills or the ability to perform effective oral presentation is the actual success for the Asian undergraduate students in both professional life career and academic life. The East Asian undergraduate students were most anxious about leading class discussions and participating in whole-class discussions. Similarly, they had difficulty with out-of-class speech discussions and activities such as asking lecturers questions outside of class. They posited that formal oral presentations and listening skills were the most essential elements for academic success in graduate

courses. Additionally, pronunciation of English was found to be the least important for East Asian graduate students' views.

Gray (2013) investigated the importance of oral communication skills for students in New Zealand intending to start an accountancy career as well as the views of accountancy professionals of New Zealand pertaining to the oral communication competencies needed by graduates of accountancy entering the workplace. The findings revealed that majority of the respondent accountancy professionals reported oral communication skills to be either essential in a new graduate. However, the results paint a bleak picture of the level of oral communication skills of new graduates of New Zealand at tertiary accountancy programmes. Gray (2013) noted that oral communication skills were not acquired by the respondents as reporting that new graduates have the required skills only seldom.

Business graduates of today are expected to possess solid oral skills. They are basically expected to enter industry with the abilities to effectively communicate. Sendall, Stowe and Schwartz (2012) explored the business students' preparedness to deliver oral presentation. This study identified the outcome of business school learning including presentation skills and the integration of oral presentation skills into the business school curriculum. Business students were surveyed regarding oral presentation. The findings demonstrated that business graduates had inspired their business partners with the use of technology, however, not with speaking skills. The authors stated that "Business practitioners give frequent presentations. Unlike students, many of these presentations are prepared individually; online delivery is common." Business schools usually require students to write and present reports in several courses. The main question addressed here is whether the oral skills that students gain in the classes are transferring to their professional careers successfully. It was found that college graduates have impressed their business partners with their use of technology, but not with their speaking skills. Sendall et.al (2012) noted that students and business practitioners realise that business school graduates need excellent oral presentation skills as they enter the workplace. Educators and language teachers should continue teaching business students oral presentations skills across the business curriculum with an emphasis on boosting individual oral presentations and pair presentations. The results will benefit business graduates in the job markets and beyond as well.

Mohd Radzuan and Kaur (2011, 2010) investigated anxiety in oral presentation of engineering undergraduate students in Malaysia. The researchers pointed out that the main sources of oral presentation apprehension which was experienced by Malaysian engineering undergraduate students in oral presentation in one of the public universities in Malaysia. The students' apprehensions in delivering oral presentations in English are due to provoking evaluation panels and restricted technical knowledge of engineering students. That is to say, Malaysian engineering students experienced different challenges that affected their attitudes to deliver oral presentation in English.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This section explains the instruments, population and sampling, research procedures and the analysis used to analyse the relevant data.

### *Instruments*

There are two instruments employed in this study, quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative part is a set of questionnaire. The questionnaire was adapted from Gardner's <sup>4</sup> Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (MBTA) and Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24). The questionnaire comprises of 15 items dealing with students' attitudes in delivering oral presentations in English. The qualitative method deals with the semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview investigates the undergraduates' hindrances in delivering oral presentation in English. The researcher interviewed the respondents based on nonprobability sampling.

### *Population and Sampling*

The population of the study is the local and international undergraduate students who take English for professional communication at Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP). To determine the sample for the study, Krejcie and Morgan's table was employed suggesting that 234 students were randomly selected as the sample of this research from overall 636 undergraduate students. The total number of the undergraduate students is obtained from the Centre for Modern Languages and

Human Sciences (CMLHS) of UMP. The undergraduate students undergo different programmes in UMP. The respondents consist of male and female students, studying in engineering faculties in the university. Their ages range from 17 up to 26 years.

*Research Procedures*

In collecting data for the study, questionnaires as well as semi- structured interview were conducted by the first researcher of the present study. The researcher started collecting the quantitative data of the study at the end of the semester one, 2015. The researcher distributed the questionnaire to the undergraduate students in their classes of English for Professional Communication. The participants took almost 20 minutes to respond to the questionnaire. The quantitative data of the study was collected within three weeks. Also, the researcher approached teachers of English for Professional Communication to obtain the undergraduates’ scores of oral presentations in English for Professional Communication classes. Moreover, the researcher conducted semi-structured interview in CMLHS classes with 12 respondents, 3 male and 9 female interviewees. They took about 30 minutes to answer the interview questions. Table 1 below summarizes the data-collecting activities for this study.

**Table 1: Dates and Activities in Collecting Data for the actual study**

| Dates                     | Activities  |
|---------------------------|---|
| 18 May 2015 – 29 May 2015 | Distribute questionnaire  |
| 18 May 2015- 04 Jun 2015  | Collect the undergraduate students’ scores of English Oral Presentation |
| 05 Jun 2015- 26 Jun 2015  | Conduct interviews.   |

*Data Analysis*

Data from questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20. Data analysis is the process used to answer the research questions of the study (Merriam, 2009). Babbie (2010) stated that quantitative methods highlight the objective measurements and numerical analysis of data that is collected through polls, questionnaires or surveys. The main focus of quantitative study is to gather numerical data and categorize them across groups of people. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics are then employed to

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describe the computed data which were collected from the survey questionnaire. The descriptive analysis was run to analyse the first research question of the study. Correlation was used in order to find the relationship between the attitudes and the scores of performance in English oral presentation among undergraduate students.

**Table 2: Research questions and *statistical techniques used in analysing quantitative data***

| Nos. | Research Questions   | Statistical tool Techniques |
|------|--|-----------------------------|
| 1.   | What is the undergraduates' attitude pertaining to English oral presentation?  | Descriptive Analysis        |
| 2.   | What is the relationship between attitude and oral performance scores in English oral presentation among undergraduates studying in UMP? | Correlation                 |

## FINDINGS

### *Quantitative Findings*

In this section, the undergraduate students were asked to identify their attitudes pertaining to delivering oral presentation in English. The result obtain was analysed to determine the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for each item of the questionnaire. The questionnaire data indicated that 11 items out of 15 items of the survey questionnaire scored a mean score above three ( $M > 3.00$ ). That is to say, 3 items scored the highest mean scores. These are, item 2 “I think it is important for me to participate in a lot of English oral presentations”, item 4 “I really work hard to perform well at oral presentations in English” and item 5 “I will appear to be educated if I can deliver oral presentation in English”. The individual mean scores are ( $M=4.08, SD= .84$ ), ( $M=4.02, SD= .73$ ) and ( $M=4.08, SD= .82$ ) respectively. The study outcome indicates that undergraduates have strong tendency and willingness towards oral presentation in English. Additionally, 8 items scored between more than three and less than four ( $M= 3.00 - 4.00$ ). These items are as follows: item 6 “I like practicing oral presentation in English.”; item 8 “I like giving a presentation in English language”; item 10 “I like delivering oral presentation in classrooms”; item 11 “I am very anxious when I am called upon to present my work orally in English language”; item 12 “I get so nervous when I am presenting oral English in class”; item 14 “I get so nervous that I forget facts I

know when I deliver a presentation in English” and item 15 “My thought become confused and jumbled when presenting orally in English”. However, only four items (1, 3, 7 and 13) scored less than three ( $M < 3.00$ ).

The aim of this study is to examine the undergraduates’ attitude in delivering English oral presentation. Based on the result above, this finding suggests that undergraduates have a positive attitude towards delivering oral presentations in English in the class. The overall mean ( $M = 3.27$ ) of descriptive analysis shows that all of the participants possess slightly positive attitude towards oral English presentations.

The researchers explored the relationship between the undergraduates’ attitudes and their oral performance scores in English oral presentations. The finding of this section was analysed employing Pearson’s product-moment correlation. The coefficient indicates the statistical strength of the linear relationship between variables under investigation of the current study (See Table 3).

**Table 3: Pearson’s correlation between the undergraduates’ attitude and their scores of English oral presentation.**

|              |                     | <b>E.O.P.S.s</b> | <b>Stds’ Attds.</b> |
|--------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| E.O.P.S.s    | Pearson Correlation | 1                | .045                |
|              | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                  | .483                |
|              | N                   | 242              | .242                |
| Stds’ Attds. | Pearson Correlation | .045             | 1                   |
|              | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .483             |                     |
|              | N                   | 242              | 242                 |

*E.O.P.S.s: English Oral Presentation Scores; Stds’ Attds. Students’ Attitudes.*

The Table 3 represents the findings of the Pearson correlation between variables. The variables were analysed based on Cohen’s (1988) guidelines. The correlation coefficients between 0.5 to 1.00 represent strong correlations. Also the correlation coefficients between 0.30 to 0.49 represent moderate correlations, and correlation coefficients between 0.01 to 0.29 represent weak or low correlation. The results of Pearson product-moment correlation is shown in Table 3. It reveals that the bivariate Pearson correlation between variables is not significant at the significant level,  $\alpha = 0.01$ . For this section, the correlation coefficient was run to examine the range of association

between variables. The correlation coefficient is found to range ( $r = .045$ ,  $p > .01$ ), which demonstrates that there is no significant correlation between the variables. i.e. There is a weak positive relationship between the students' attitudes and their oral performance scores in English oral presentation.

### ***Qualitative Findings***

The participants were asked some questions relating to the topic in order to warm them up and to introduce them to the topic that interviews are about.

#### *Anxiety*

Anxiety is the most dominant impression that is initially stated as a psychological state that hampers undergraduate students towards oral presentations. Most of the interviewees reported that anxiety was an impediment to them when they were assigned to deliver English oral presentations. For instance, a female undergraduate was asked about her feeling about delivering oral presentations in English. She answered, "I am an introvert person so, I am very scared of talking in front of people" (F/6). Other respondents reported their feelings as follows:

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*F3: Of course I feel so nervous because I have a lack of confidence. Whenever I am in class, I say certain sounds to express something so I keep saying (sic present). I get disturbed not because of the audience but I have a lack of confidence. It will make my presentation not flow beautifully.*

*M1: Delivering oral presentation in English is quite hard because of my confidence level is quite low. I become so nervous and shy. It is because of the audience (my classmates) looking at me.*

*F7: I would like to perform oral presentation in English but my problem is the stage fright so I easily get nervous. I cannot control my feelings while I am presenting in class.*

*F10: I am very nervous when I present. I do not know why. Sometimes I try to remember but I cannot.*



Anxiety is related to the students' oral presentations in the class. It is one of the main barriers that hamper undergraduate students to deliver oral presentations. Based on the data, the undergraduate students reveal that overcoming anxiety is always the problem that they wish to overcome in delivering English oral presentations. Most of them are anxious in conveying their ideas in English oral presentation.

#### *Poor in English Language Proficiency*

The respondents were asked about their different impediments they face while they are delivering their presentations. The interviewees revealed significant aspects such as oral performance delivery as well as conversations in English. English oral proficiency is seen as an obstacle in delivering oral presentation as some of the respondents stated *"My English is not good, because I have to sit in front and I have to talk, explain, my pronunciation of certain words is not accurate and also my grammar. Sometimes, I misuse simple personal pronouns such as he, she, him, her...you know! Simple grammar rules. I use it wrongly. I studied in a village school which is not like town schools. They did not teach us how to use the right grammar rules and how important is to speak English"* F/3.

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*M2: "English is not spoken everywhere in Malaysia. I usually speak in Bahasa Malayu. It is much better to speak in Bahasa Malayu rather than English. Problem of English comes from schooling time such as middle school or high school. Additionally, I do not have a huge background (Vocabulary) which means that if I have limited vocabulary about a given topic I become more uncomfortable due to restricted vocabulary. Also, fluency and accuracy, sometimes I want to tell this but I tell something else. So, it is very hard for me to perform in English"*.

*M4: "When it comes to present orally, English is one of my problems in oral presentation. I sometimes do not know what I say and how to express my ideas and I do not know if it is correct or not"*.

English is considered as the medium of oral presentation of the students of the current study. It is one of the students' barriers in delivering effective oral presentation in the class. Data revealed from the interviews indicate that students experienced difficulty in conveying their ideas and

contents of the chosen topics to their classmates and lecturers. Most of the students suffer from language skills inadequacy such as grammar, particularly tenses and language structure, other respondents experienced difficulties with pronunciation. Similarly, other students suffer from their limited vocabulary background in presenting their topics. Delivering an oral presentation in English has prevented them from giving an effective and successful oral presentations.

### *Classroom Atmosphere*

One of the factors that make undergraduate students have an effective contribution to their oral presentation is the classroom environment. The respondents revealed very important issues concerning their academic environment in which they deliver their oral presentations. It is found that the environment sometimes is not suitable to deliver an English oral presentation due to noise and no attention from the audience (classmates and peers) or carelessness of the audience as a female respondent stated that: *“While I am presenting, sometimes some of my classmates disturb my presentation and make a fun of me or chatting with each other, so I get distracted and I lose my ideas of oral presentation. (F/7)”*. Furthermore, another female interviewee reported *“I have a difficulty to deal with audience, especially when I see them doing their own stuff, so I get the idea that oral presentation is boring and not interested” (F/5)*. Also a female respondent claimed *“The classroom environment is very important for me. I get really disturbed when I see my classmates chatting and talking to each other while I am presenting.” (F/6)*. Additionally, a female participant stated: *“My classmates do not pay attention to my presentation. They keep talking to each other” (F/10)*.

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A possible explanation for this factor might be that the classroom atmosphere is a setting in which the students deliver their oral presentations is sometimes seen as a hindrance. The interviewees assert that if the classroom environment is not suitable for the presenter, the performance of the presenters will not be as it is expected due to noise from their mates.

**\*Note:** *The respondents’ scripts were not amended or corrected by the researchers to ensure the confidentiality and authenticity of their perspectives in the present study.*

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Students' attitude is one of the main factors that should be identified in academic setting. It impedes the process of speaking English and performing oral presentations of the students (Benraghda, Ali & Mohd Radzuan, 2015, 2016). The current study has identified the attitudes of students at Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) in delivering oral English presentation in academic settings. Learner's performance in speaking is entirely affected by students' attitudes (Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009). Successful or unsuccessful performances of students are completely determined by their attitudes pertaining to the contextual environment in which it is basically experienced by students (Lennartson, 2008). The current study shows that the students have a positive attitude towards oral English presentations. Moreover, a positive correlation is found between the students' attitude and their oral performance scores in oral English presentations. However, there is no statistically significant correlation between the students' attitude and their scores in oral English presentations. The current study also reveals that students are interested in participating in various oral activities that are presented in English.

The study therefore highlights the need for teachers to provide a more appropriate environment, including support and encouragement which may produce a greater comprehension, lower students' anxiety and, as such, motivate them towards delivering oral presentations. More oral presentation skills are needed, along with mastering the target language for the undergraduate students to develop their own oral presentation skills and to conduct their oral presentations effectively in a tertiary professional context.

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