

Speaking Apprehension: Evidence from Oral Presentations in Content Subject Classes

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ABSTRACT – Oral presentation has become a crucial task at the tertiary level regardless of the discipline of study. The engineering, science or management disciplines are no exception as delivering an oral presentation in a content subject class is a common sight nowadays, be it individual or group presentations. However, many students face difficulties when carrying out this task as they experience speaking apprehension. This study investigated anxiety-related problems experienced by engineering students in delivering oral presentations in English in their content subject classes. A total of 125 undergraduate students from a public university participated in the study. They were given a set of questionnaire to find out anxiety-related problems they faced when giving oral presentations. Based on responses gathered, 15 students who claimed to have experienced a high level of anxiety were identified. Consent was sought from these students and their lecturers to observe them doing an actual oral presentation in one of their content subject classes. Observation sessions were carried out to see any clear evidence of anxiety symptom occurrences. This was followed up by a semi-structured interview with the 15 students. Findings revealed that anxiety was evident among the students observed. Several factors were identified which include the type of presentation done, the language used and lack or last-minute preparation. The symptoms observed fall under the categories of bodily, expressive, verbal and emotional reactions. This study has brought about a number of implications concerning content subject curriculum, English language teaching, and soft skills training.

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INTRODUCTION

Although English is a second language in Malaysia, it is becoming more important than before as the society has started to see its importance in today's competitive digital age. At the tertiary level, English is offered as a compulsory course for all undergraduate students. And in English classes, it is common to find oral presentation being used as a task to assess students' communicative ability. However, many English as a Second Language (ESL) learners find oral presentation as frustrating and intimidating (King, 2002), challenging (Kho & Leong, 2015), stressful (Kunioishi, Gonuchi, Hayashi & Tojo, 2014), and the most problematic oral communication skill (Soomro et al., 2019).

Despite that, the oral presentation is here to stay. In fact, now in many content subject courses, the oral presentation has become a widely adopted task that students have to complete in order to fulfil certain course requirements. Students in engineering faculties are experiencing a similar situation when it comes to oral presentations.

In many parts of the world, engineering students can be more successful in getting jobs because of their communication skills (Soomro et al., 2019). In Malaysia, there may not have been many studies done on engineering students and communication skills not until the later part of the 1990s (see for example Seliman, 1996; Othman, 2004; Devi & Feroz, 2008; Radzuan & Kaur, 2011; Shamsudin, Md Yusof & Abdul Raof, 2012). The issue of ineffective communication, including oral presentations of engineering students has raised concerns among academics involving the engineering community (see Ali, Radzuan & Kassim, 2006; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Bhattacharyya, 2011; Idrus, Salleh, and Abdullah, 2011; Attan, Abdul Raof, Hamzah, Mohd Omar & Md Yusof, 2016; Mohamed & Asmawi, 2018).

Delivering an oral presentation could be challenging but what is even more challenging for students is to deliver an oral presentation on a content subject topic, in English. In such situation, it is no surprise to see students grapple with speaking apprehension. One crucial factor which could be the main cause of this is anxiety as MacIntyre and Gardner (1989), Price (1991), Shamril Wan (2005) and, Kakepoto, Habil, Omar and Said (2012) among others, found out; speaking in a second/foreign language in front of an audience caused anxiety.

The connection between anxiety among ESL/EFL learners and oral presentation regardless of students' proficiency is unquestionable. Bali (2017) found out that a high level of anxiety had negative impact on her research participants when delivering oral presentations. The participants who were postgraduate students from the Department of English displayed symptoms of anxiety, or what she referred to as anxiety indices, such as trembling hands, overused gestures, and jumping from one idea to another. These affected their delivery when they depended too much on their notes, had poor eye contact with the audience, and hence lacked interaction. Ka-kan-dee and Al-Shaibani (2018) discovered that two-thirds of their

EFL students experienced high level of anxiety when it comes to doing oral presentations related to their content subject. When probed further, most of them admitted that they did not like giving oral presentations as they lacked confidence and presenting skills. Ironically, these students were following a training programme for tourist guides. A study by Yamashiro and McLaughlin (2001) on Japanese college students revealed that higher levels of anxiety tend to indicate a lower proficiency level. The feeling of anxiety and its related symptoms would add up to poor performances. Subsequently, anxiety problems and other related factors presumably are the key factors that hinder students from performing their best in oral presentation.

This paper reports on a study which investigated anxiety-related problems experienced by engineering students when delivering oral presentations in English in their content subject classes. Findings related to factors of anxiety and associated symptoms will be described, and pedagogical implications will be discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anxiety is a common feeling of fear or worry about something. In the context of learning a second or foreign language, there is what has been called language anxiety. According to MacIntyre (1998), language anxiety is “the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language” (p.27) and this occurs when a learner is expected to perform in the target language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). One common task that learners have to perform is speaking to a group of people using the target language such as delivering an oral presentation.

The topic of anxiety in oral presentation has received numerous interest from researchers all over the world up until today. Some of the recent studies include those by Hammad (2020) who studied the impact of oral presentations delivered by EFL learners in Palestine, Ireland (2020) who investigated levels of speaking apprehension towards presentation and the probable reasons as faced by freshmen at a British university, Soomro et al. (2019) who looked at the factors of anxiety observed during oral presentation delivered by students in Pakistan, Ka-kan-dee and Al-Shaibani (2018) who investigated the levels of anxiety and explored the feelings of Thai students when delivering oral presentations, and Seggar and Sid Ali (2017) who analysed the correlation between learners’ speaking anxiety and oral presentation of Algerian postgraduate students.

The background of participants involved in related studies ranges from the social sciences and humanities to engineering. Studies by Hammad (2020), Aliyu, Korau and Basiru (2019), Razawi, Zulkornain, and Mohd Razlan (2019) among others, engaged ESL/EFL learners while Imaniah (2018) and Kurniawan (2016) involved education majors, Seggar and Sid Ali (2017) had English majors and Khouya (2018) non-English majors as participants. In addition, Ka-kan-dee and Al-Shaibani (2018) studied tourism students, Ireland (2020) and Roberts (2017) analysed accountancy students while Soomro et al. (2019) and, Kho and Leong (2015) involved engineering undergraduates.

Regardless of the background of the participants, anxiety is felt even more so when learners are not prepared or have not been given enough time to prepare, thus becoming more anxious while delivering oral presentations (Kho & Leong, 2015; Imaniah, 2018; Razawi, Zulkornain, & Mohd Razlan, 2019). Learners may leave the oral presentation preparation to the last minute as they have other deadlines to meet, tests to sit and assignments to complete. This could contribute to an increase in anxiety level and learners may not perform their best in the presentation. Thus, it is not surprising when engineering students claimed that lack of preparation and lack of confidence were among the main causes of difficulties in oral presentation in the Kho and Leong (2015) study. On the other hand, Soomro et al. (2019) claimed that because of stress and nervousness, students tend to forget points to deliver despite having prepared for the presentation. The participants of their study were engineering undergraduates of which more than 70% indicated that stress and nervousness was the top barrier that affected their performance in oral presentation.

It is also common to hear that learners experience anxiety when they are being evaluated based on their performance in an oral presentation. Most learners are afraid to perform if grades are given compared to just a practice performance. For example, Sewell and Kim (2011) conducted a study on 47 university students in Korea and found out that the level of anxiety was very high when the students knew that their speaking activities, including oral presentations, would be evaluated. Kurniawan (2016) found out that language education students with higher grade point average (GPA) experienced more complex or varied anxiety when tasked with oral presentations. Among these were the fear of facing a strict lecturer and getting difficult questions from him/her, the worry about their presentation being boring hence rated as giving a poor performance, and the fear of making mistakes which could not satisfy the audience and lecturer.

When language anxiety occurs, symptoms related to it could be observed. Andrade and Williams (2009) asserted that among the physical symptoms shown by ESL learners who are anxious include rapid heartbeat, muscle tension, dry mouth and excessive perspiration. In addition, physiological symptoms could also occur such as the feelings of embarrassment, helplessness, fear, going blank and poor memory recall. Matsumoto et al. (1988) deliberated on similar symptoms but categorised them according to bodily symptoms, expressive reactions, and verbal reactions and listed a more comprehensive list of symptoms than Andrade and Williams (2009). Some examples of bodily symptoms which could be observed include shivering and cheeks burning while examples of expressive reactions are smiling, changes in facial expression and gesturing, and those of verbal reactions include silence, short utterances and speech disturbance (for more examples of each category see Appendix). Hammad (2020) also observed symptoms of anxiety among the participants of her study but her list of symptoms was not as comprehensive as that of Matsumoto’s et al. (1988).

Another symptom of anxiety which is easily observable is avoidance, for example, avoiding eye contact with the audience. This is commonly identified among learners who experience anxiety so as to hide the feeling of nervousness and awkwardness when standing in front of others such as in an oral presentation situation (Hammad, 2020). Based on

experience dealing with such learners, among the common avoidance strategies used include gazing at one point only, such as the wall at the back of the room and looking at notes most of the time.

Experiencing such symptoms when delivering an oral presentation would undoubtedly affect the quality of output as well as leave a negative impact on learners. Learners often feel stressed and apprehensive when it comes to doing oral presentations, be it individually or in groups as they assume that they would get negative feedback from their oral presentations (See for example, Mustapha, 2010 and Woodrow, 2008) and affecting their confidence, too (Al Harun, Amirul Islam & Rahman, 2016; Kurniawan, 2016; Kho & Leong, 2015). In individual presentations, the feedback learners received would be personally directed to the individuals, but in group presentations it would be for the group as a whole. Nevertheless, learners would still think that they should share the responsibility in making sure their individual performance would not affect their group's performance.

The challenge would be even more when content subject classes at the tertiary level have started to embed oral presentation as part of their course assessment. This includes individual or group project-based technical presentations related to specific fields. As to meet the requirement of the university, most of the presentations are evaluated and graded to provide evidence on graduates' acquiring a certain standard of communication skills to keep up with the needs of industries (Riemer, 2001). In relation to this, Kassim and Ali (2010) surveyed engineers working in ten multinational chemical companies in Malaysia to find out what were being practised in their workplace. The intention was to collect information to feed educators and language practitioners to better prepare engineering students for the workplace. They found out that oral communication skills should be given more emphasis over written communication, and fluency in the English language was seen as an opportunity to advance further in the career path of engineers.

A number of studies have been conducted involving oral communication of engineering students at the tertiary level. In a recent study, Soomro et al. (2019) surveyed 100 engineering students, mainly males, and found out that oral presentation was voted as the top most problematic oral communication skill. In addition, slightly more than half of the students surveyed indicated that fear and anxiety was a factor affecting their performance in oral presentation showing symptoms such as rushing to finish the presentation, having difficulty in communicating ideas, and mumbling during presentation. Another study on engineering students doing oral presentation revealed that the students experienced communication apprehension at a moderate level. Nevertheless, the lecturers' evaluation of the students showed it had somehow affected the students' performance (Devi & Feroz, 2008). Bhattacharya and Sargunan (2009) surveyed 240 final year engineering students and found out that anxiety occurred due to the level of confidence and limited skills in delivering oral presentations. Language skills, presentation techniques, and non verbal attributes were perceived to be important dimensions to consider in order to reduce the occurrence of anxiety.

Other studies include one by Radzuan and Kaur (2010) who examined the oral communication apprehension faced by 193 final year engineering students in English language use in an engineering course. One of the findings, as perceived by the respondents, was that public speaking had a higher communication apprehension compared to meetings and group discussions conducted using the English language. An interesting study by Galván-Sánchez, Verano-Tacoronte, González-Betancor, Fernández-Monroy, and Bolívar-Cruz (2017) who attempted to develop a scoring rubric to assess oral presentations of engineering students. The presentations were done in a content-subject class. Outcome of the study reveals that students found the rubrics as having a positive impact on their learning with a clear orientation to improve their performance. Additionally, the proposed rubric was found to be valid, reliable and, suitable for the teaching and assessment of content-subject oral presentations.

The literature reviewed shows that many studies have been conducted encompassing topics on anxiety and oral presentation involving learners from many parts of the world and from various backgrounds. Nonetheless, further studies need to be carried out to have a better understanding of specific factors that cause anxiety and the related symptoms especially those involving oral presentation of technical subject matter delivered in English. The study reported in this paper intended to look further into this. The findings may provide insights to educators, ESL and engineering alike, on the challenges and difficulties some students experience when faced with the task of delivering an oral presentation.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to investigate anxiety-related problems experienced by engineering students when delivering oral presentations in English in their content subject classes. As there are many factors affecting the performance in oral presentations, it is important to focus on one which is anxiety. In addition, the symptoms of anxiety are also examined.

Findings of the study may serve as a guide for educators to develop appropriate interventions to reduce the anxiety level faced by students when delivering oral presentations. By understanding the problems better, guidelines for students could be provided for them to give better presentations. In addition, engineering lecturers would be more aware of the challenges faced by their students and could offer relevant assistance to develop their students in becoming future professionals. For students themselves, the study helps to identify which factors lead to their anxiety, therefore they are able to find out the causes, symptoms and effects of their own anxiety-related problems in oral presentations for their own self-improvement.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The study was conducted on engineering students at a tertiary institution in Malaysia. A total of 125 randomly picked students participated in this study to determine the anxiety they faced when delivering oral presentations in English in their content subject classes. All of them were undergraduate students from three engineering faculties - Civil, Electrical and Mechanical engineering.

Research Instruments and Procedure

There were three phases of the study. In the first phase, a set of questionnaire, adapted from Matsumoto et al. (1988), was used. It comprised four sections; background of respondents, background of oral presentation at the engineering faculty, anxiety-related experience in oral presentation, and role of content subject lecturers in relation to oral presentation. The responses were analysed using descriptive statistics before the second phase of the study was carried out.

The second phase involved carrying out observation sessions on participants who, from the responses in the questionnaire, claimed to have experienced a high level of anxiety. One specific item in the questionnaire asked participants about an anxiety experience that they faced when delivering an oral presentation in English, "How intense was the feeling?". Participants had to choose a number between 1 and 5 (1 being the least intense and 5 being the most intense). Those who chose either 4 or 5 were identified and approached to seek consent to observe them delivering an oral presentation in English in their content subject classes. A total of 15 participants gave their consent and they were all male, second year Engineering undergraduate students. Consent was also sought from their content subject lecturers to gain permission to conduct observation sessions in the respective classes. In this study, two classes where the 15 observation sessions took place were the Thermodynamic and, Multimedia and Technology Application. Each oral presentation was done individually and lasted between four and six minutes.

The purpose of the session was to observe any clear evidence of anxiety symptom occurrences. Neither video nor audio recordings were made to avoid any interference to the running of the presentation session as well as not to induce any unnecessary apprehension among the participants. This meant that the observer had to find a good location to sit to ensure a full view of the participant, and to write detailed notes as much as possible. Nevertheless, throughout the session the observer had assumed a non-participant role observing occurrences of anxiety symptoms using a checklist (see Appendix) adapted from Matsumoto et al. (1988).

In the third phase, a semi-structured interview session was carried out individually with the 15 participants who were observed. Each interview session took place within a few days after the observation was completed so as to ensure each participant could recall the oral presentation experience. The purpose of the interview was to have a clearer picture of what went on in the oral presentation session and to reconfirm the findings gathered from the questionnaire and observation. In addition, the interview also further explored anxiety-related problems which occurred among the participants in more detail. The duration of each interview session was about 10 minutes and the language used was English and Bahasa Melayu. Open-ended questions were used to further explore the anxiety-related problems faced by the participants in more detail. Examples of these are listed below:

1. Do you think you did well in the oral presentation? If not, why?
2. Did you feel anxious when you delivered the oral presentation? Could you describe the experience?
3. Did you expect this to happen? How long did it last?
4. Which type of oral presentation gives you more anxiety, individual or group? Why do you say so?
5. In my observation of your presentation I noticed you showed some symptoms of anxiety such as _____ (an example of the symptom). Could you describe that feeling?
6. What could have caused that feeling?
(Repeat question 4 - 5 for other symptoms)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Factors of Anxiety

The results of the study clearly indicated that there was an existence of anxiety among the participants. There were several factors that triggered anxiety-related problems as gathered from responses to the questionnaire, observation, and interview sessions. These are described below.

Types of Presentation

The first factor is the type of presentation that the participants had to deliver. Almost two thirds (64.8%) of the participants said that in any one semester they had to do more than three group oral presentations and almost half (46.4%) said they had to do one individual oral presentation. As individual oral presentation was less frequent than group oral presentation, participants stated that whenever they had to do it, the level of anxiety was higher compared to when doing group oral presentations. This was claimed by one of the participants during the interview when he said,

Every time when doing oral presentation individually, I always feel worried. It lasts for a few minutes, I had unwanted thoughts and my heart beats faster than usual. (S78)

The above response provides support to the responses made by 85 other respondents (68%) from the questionnaire who agreed that individual oral presentations gave them higher anxiety compared to group oral presentations. This is in line with Sewell and Kim's (2011) study in which they asserted that most respondents would normally experience higher anxiety when doing any communicative activity individually. In addition, the interview sessions also revealed that they were not expected to do many individual oral presentations thus lacking exposure to this type of presentation.

Limited Language Proficiency

Another factor which contributed to higher anxiety level was limited language proficiency in English. A total of 47 participants (38%) stated that English language problems as the main factor contributing to their anxiety. This re-affirms the findings of Radzuan and Kaur (2011), and Razawi, Zulkornain, and Mohd Razlan (2019). Having limited linguistic competence in the English language, the participants were afraid of being laughed at as they were not capable of conveying ideas using correct language.

From the observations carried out, the participants' incapability in using the target language was clearly shown and this had affected their performance in the oral presentation. Some did not use the correct vocabulary when delivering ideas, thus the meaning was distorted. The audience found it was hard to understand what they were trying to say. This was admitted by a participant who said,

My biggest common mistake lies on my language problem. I wasn't able to say it using correct English. (S73)

Another participant added by saying,

I got nervous because my English is not good...when I start to open my mouth, I'd go blank. (S.80)

Similar symptom occurrences were recorded by Kurniawan (2016) -- mind went blank, and Soomro et al. (2019) -- difficulty in communicating ideas, and mumbling, when participants of their studies who experienced anxiety delivered oral presentations.

Self-efficacy Problem

There were 36 participants (29%) who claimed that their own self efficacy as ESL students could be one factor which triggered anxiety. In a provoking activity such as in an oral presentation, it is common to be psychologically anxious especially when using the target language and with the presence of an audience, in line with studies by MacIntyre and Gardner (1989), Price (1991), and Shamril Wan (2005) on what made students anxious. Nonetheless, this differs with Idrus and Salleh (2008) who found out that Malaysian ESL students majoring in engineering and technology were perceived to have high self-efficacy in their ability to speak in English.

Perhaps some form of intervention could reduce the apprehension of the students taking heed of the findings of Roberts (2017) who explored the use of self efficacy techniques as an intervention in reducing communication apprehension. He found out that personal mastery (or practice) was the strongest influence on participants' communication self-efficacy. Others include support by their classmates and having good role models.

Lack or Last Minute Preparation

Another factor, lack of preparation or last minute preparation, was also thought to be common among the participants with a combined total of 39 participants (31.2%) choosing these factors. From the observations made, most presenters who did not thoroughly prepare for their presentation failed to deliver their ideas well. Due to improper preparation before an oral presentation, majority of the students would still be worried even if they thought they had prepared well. Likewise, they would easily forget what they wanted to say and not organised their ideas logically (Razawi, Zulkornain and Mohd Razlan, 2019), and rushing to finish the presentation (Soomro et al., 2019).

The following quotes from the interview sessions sum this up:

During the presentation, I talked too fast and then changed my tempo. My sentences were jumbled up because I was not prepared. (S81)

Because of lack of preparation, I felt so nervous, cold and started to shiver when talking to the audience. (S80)

Symptoms of Anxiety

Three categories of symptoms, bodily symptoms, expressive reactions, and verbal reactions, as categorised by Matsumoto et al. (1988) and one additional category, emotional reaction, were used in identifying the occurrence of anxiety. The additional category was based on data collected during the observation sessions. These are described below using data from the questionnaire, observation and interview sessions.

Bodily Symptoms

Andrade and Williams (2009) asserted that physical symptoms shown by ESL learners who are anxious include rapid heartbeat, muscle tension, dry mouth and excessive perspiration. This is in line with the data collected in this study. One third of the total respondents of the questionnaire agreed that their heart would beat faster when they experienced anxiety. This is followed by feeling cold or shivering and stomach troubles. Table 1 below shows the details.

Table 1. Bodily reactions during oral presentation.

Reactions	Frequency	Percent
Heart beating faster	42	33.6
Cold/shivering	34	27.2
Stomach troubles	31	24.8
Lump in throat	16	12.8
Muscle tensing	1	0.8
Perspiring	1	0.8

The top bodily reaction, heart beating faster, is a rather common symptom. However, as it could not be physically visible to the naked eye, other symptoms could be identified such as heavy breathing and trembling of the voice. On the other hand, feeling cold or shivering could be seen through uncontrolled shaking of the limbs. These symptoms were evident from the observation sessions. In addition, interviews with the participants revealed the following:

I was very nervous, my heart was beating faster and it was the most uncomfortable situation. My hand was trembling and my mind went blank. (S87)

The worst experience was when my heart beat was fast . . . it was like it's going to explode. I was cold and shivering when it's time to present. My mind went blank. (S86)

Expressive Reactions

Responses gathered from the questionnaire show about a third of the total respondents chose changes of voice and about another third chose changes of gesturing when they felt anxious during their oral presentation. This is followed by a quarter choosing laughing or smiling (see Table 2 for details).

Table 2. Expressive reactions during oral presentation.

Reactions	Frequency	Percent
Changes in voice	39	31.2
Changes in gesturing	38	30.4
Laughing/Smiling	32	25.6
Changes in facial expression	10	8.0
Moving against people/things	5	4.0
Others	1	0.8

The results are supported by the observations made where presenters changed their tone of voice from higher to lower tone when they were anxious. They were not projecting their voice as a presenter should thus showing that they were unsure of what to say. Changes in gesture were observed too especially with the hands, for instance gesturing with one or both hands without a good reason, fidgeting with a pen, and moving objects on the desk where one was standing. Abrupt bodily movement was also shown when a presenter moved from side to side instead of maintaining a steady posture. Another behaviour observed was smiling without any reason. This was especially true with a number of participants, when they did not know what to say.

Verbal Reactions

The table below shows the distribution of how anxiety had caused verbal reactions to participants who experienced anxiety as perceived by the respondents. Speech disturbance was on top of the list followed by speech tempo changes with a combined frequency count of 100 (or 80%). Short utterances, speech melody changes, and others made up the rest. More details are found in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Verbal reactions during oral presentation.

Reactions	Frequency	Percent
Speech disturbance	56	44.8
Speech tempo changes	44	35.2
Short utterances	13	10.4
Speech melody changes	10	8.0
Others	2	1.6

During the observation, participants who experienced anxiety showed several patterns of verbal reactions when using the English language. It was identified that speech disturbance happened when they were anxious. Among the participants, about 45% had experienced speech disturbance during the presentations. This can be seen clearly during the

presentation where most of the students' ideas could not be understood as they failed to explain them clearly even using simple English.

Speech tempo changes seemed to be affected too. There were about 35% of the participants who experienced changes of speech tempo during the presentation. The presenters observed were seen to be affected by their emotions. Inconsistency of the pace of speech seemed obvious too. This was admitted by one of the presenters who said,

During the presentation, I talked fast and then change my tempo. My sentences were jumbled up because I was not prepared. (S81)

Emotional Reactions

From Table 4 below more than half of the total respondents agreed that they could not concentrate when they were anxious of their own performance. Another one third said their mind would go blank. Unwanted thoughts did not receive a high response rate with only 14.4%. Nevertheless, it should not be brushed aside. Table 4 below has the details.

Table 4. Emotional reactions during oral presentation.

Reactions	Frequency	Percent
Could not concentrate	65	52
Mind went blank	41	32.8
Unwanted thoughts	18	14.4
Others	1	0.8

During the observation, it was obvious among ten participants (out of 15) who could not concentrate on their own presentation. They could not focus on what they wanted to say, therefore their ideas were jumbled up and disorganised. As one participant in the interview said,

My experience when I do the oral presentation is very bad. I could not concentrate on my presentation and feel nervous, thus making me lose my points. I am not confident with my presentation, so does the audience, I guess. (S74)

Another said the following:

My sentences were jumbled up because I was not prepared. (S81)

Similar findings were recorded by Bali (2017) and Somroo et al. (2019) when their participants displayed or claimed to have confused and jumbled up thoughts. On the other hand, those who went blank during the presentation had long and frequent pauses before they could continue their speech. As one interview participant said,

I got nervous because my English is not good. When I start to open my mouth, I go blank. (S80)

Those who seemed to have been disturbed by unwanted thoughts such as worrying too much showed that they were not comfortable and this could be seen for example through their facial expressions. One interview participant confessed,

I've planned on what to say but because I was too afraid, I lost my concentration and almost forgot what to say. (S74)

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study suggest some pedagogical implications for ESL/EFL educators as well as content subject educators. It is imperative that oral presentation skills be given due emphasis in the curriculum in preparing learners for the workplace (Mohamed and Asmawi, 2018). It is through the understanding of the factors that enhance the anxiety-related problems, they would be aware that appropriate actions should be taken in order to attend to these problems.

First, more opportunities and exposure should be given to different types of presentations for the students to familiarise themselves with. As apparently as there was limited opportunity in delivering individual oral presentations, students should be given more chances to practice and enculturate themselves with this type of presentation.

Secondly, it is advisable that the pedagogy of oral presentation could be incorporated formally into the content subject courses. Therefore, students would get the additional guidance from their content subject lecturers with regard specific norms, practice or requirements of the community of practice such as the engineering and sciences. This is in addition to what they are getting from the English classes. Even though anxiety seems to have negative influence on the performance of students, the integration of oral presentations in a number of courses and frequent practice could enhance self-confidence among the students and thus reduce anxiety level (Seggar and Sid Ali, 2017; Hammad, 2020).

Finally, due to the language problems that students have, more 'English time' should be allocated. This could be in the form of more hours in the English courses offered, or more exposure to English in the content subject courses. For example, through reading of articles or reports in English related to the topics taught in class, and through discussion of class activities and project work in English. In addition, more collaborative work between the faculties and the English department should be carried out and encouraged. Perhaps then both parties would be able to cooperate to provide better teaching and learning materials, and suggest appropriate methodology and assessment procedures.

CONCLUSION

Findings of this study provide insights into anxiety-related issues which leave an impact on students' performance in oral presentations. The evidence collected from content subject classes reveals that the challenges faced by the students were real and should not be taken lightly. Like any other initiatives, support and cooperation from relevant parties are needed to resolve the issue at hand. In this context, the role of ESL and content subject course instructors, the language and engineering departments, and the engineering community in which the students would eventually join, in coming up with practical solutions cannot be overemphasized. Nonetheless, students too, should play a more active role and be responsible for their own learning so they become better presenters when delivering oral presentations and better communicators in general.

In today's competitive workplace environment, graduates with effective communication skills stand a better chance of being recruited. Thus, before joining the community of profession, students should be engaged in developing the right mindset, and in acquiring the much needed communication skills besides having a strong technical know how. We could then be hopeful of producing the right professionals to be part of the team which could continue to develop our nation.

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APPENDIX

Anxiety symptoms checklist (Adapted from Matsumoto et al., 1988, p.273)

Symptoms	Examples
Bodily Symptoms	lump in throat; change in breathing; stomach troubles; feeling cold, shivering; feeling hot, cheeks burning; heart beating faster; muscles tensing, trembling; perspiring, moist hands; other symptoms
Expressive Reactions	laughing, smiling; crying, sobbing; changes in facial expression; screaming, yelling; changes in voice; changes in gesturing; abrupt bodily movements; moving toward other people or things; withdrawing from people or things; other expressive reactions
Verbal Reactions	laughing, smiling; crying, sobbing; changes in facial expression; screaming, yelling; changes in voice; changes in gesturing; abrupt bodily movements; moving toward other people or things; withdrawing from people or things; other expressive reactions