

DIFFICULTIES IN GIVING ENGLISH ORAL PRESENTATIONS FACED BY ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS AT THANG LONG UNIVERSITY

Nguyễn Thục Trinh*

Nguyễn Thảo Phương*✉

Nhận bài: 13/02/2025; Nhận kết quả bình duyệt: 13/05/2025; Chấp nhận đăng: 20/09/2025

©2025 Trường Đại học Thăng Long

Abstract

Making a presentation is one of the most popular activities in the classes of the English department at Thang Long University. However, many students are unable to deliver a good presentation. They often feel worried or extremely anxious when orally presenting their ideas in English in front of their instructors and classmates, and their performances are certainly not interesting or impressive enough to attract the audience. Therefore, the researchers conducted this research with the main goal of finding out common problems faced by English-majored students when giving an oral presentation at Thang Long University. It is hoped that this research can be helpful not only for students but also for teachers in upgrading presentation activities.

Keywords: difficulties, English oral presentations, English-majored students, Thang Long University, TLU.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale of the research

Nowadays, English has become the primary means of communication in various fields, including education, culture, politics, medicine, and business. Proficiency in English allows individuals to advance in their professions, as many jobs require strong English skills, particularly in communication and diplomacy. Notably, excellent English presentation skills can open doors to high-paying jobs and career promotions (Idrus, 2016).

According to Alshare & Hindi (2004), student presentations in the classroom play a crucial role in fostering positive learning experiences. However, delivering oral presentations remains a challenge for many students. Therefore, the research titled *"Difficulties in Giving English Oral Presentations Faced by English-Majored Students at Thang Long University"* was conducted to help English learners-especially English majors at Thang Long University-identify their challenges in oral

* Trường Đại học Thăng Long, ✉ phuong.nt@thanglong.edu.vn

presentations. By recognizing these difficulties, students can find motivation to improve their skills and enhance their English proficiency.

Additionally, teachers can gain valuable insights to better support students in developing effective presentation skills.

1.2. Research objectives

The objectives of this research is to investigate the difficulties English-majored students at Thang Long University face when giving oral presentations in English, analyze students' attitudes toward the importance of oral English presentations and identify the factors influencing their presentation abilities. To achieve these objectives, the research seeks to answer two key questions: What are students' attitudes toward oral English presentations in class? And what are the main factors influencing their presentation abilities?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definition of oral presentations

Oral presentations represent a critical communication modality characterized by structured verbal information transmission and interactive knowledge sharing (Bligh, 2000; Goffman, 1959; Zarefsky, 2008). According to Beetham and Sharpe (2013), such presentations are fundamental to knowledge exchange, serving as pivotal platforms for intellectual discourse and information dissemination.

2.2. Difficulties in giving oral presentations

Oral presentations represent complex communicative challenges encompassing psychological, cognitive, and performative barriers across various professional and academic contexts.

2.2.1. Language proficiency difficulties

Language proficiency represents a critical and complex challenge in oral presentations, particularly for non-native speakers navigating academic and professional communication environments. Researchers like Cummins (2008) and Flowerdew (2013) have extensively documented the multifaceted linguistic barriers that significantly impact presentation effectiveness.

Non-native speakers encounter numerous linguistic challenges that extend beyond basic language comprehension. These challenges include:

- **Vocabulary Limitations**

Presenters often struggle with discipline-specific terminology, technical vocabulary, and nuanced academic language. Schmitt (2010) argues that disciplinary vocabularies represent intricate linguistic landscapes requiring sophisticated cognitive and linguistic adaptability. The inability to precisely articulate complex concepts can lead to reduced communication clarity and potential misinterpretation.

- **Grammatical Precision**

Grammatical inconsistencies and structural complexities frequently impede effective communication. Non-native speakers may experience challenges in constructing complex sentence structures, maintaining grammatical coherence, and expressing sophisticated argumentative frameworks (Elder & McNamara, 2007).

- **Pronunciation and Phonological Challenges**

Pronunciation difficulties significantly influence perceived communication competence. Derwing and Munro (2015) highlight that pronunciation variations can impact audience comprehension, potentially undermining the presenter's perceived credibility and expertise.

2.2.2. Skill and preparatory challenges

Preparatory challenges significantly impact oral presentation quality. Edwards and Westgate (2007) argue that inadequate preparation represents a fundamental barrier to effective communication. This encompasses challenges in content research, narrative development, strategic information synthesis, and performance skill refinement. Many presenters struggle with translating complex information into accessible, compelling narratives, particularly when addressing interdisciplinary or technically sophisticated audiences.

2.2.3. Psychological challenges

Psychological barriers constitute a significant dimension of oral presentation difficulties, with research consistently highlighting public speaking anxiety as a predominant concern. Scholars like Dwyer and Davidson (2012) have extensively documented the pervasive nature of communication apprehension, demonstrating that approximately 75% of individuals experience moderate to severe anxiety during public speaking engagements. This psychological distress manifests through physiological responses, including increased heart rate, perspiration, and cognitive paralysis, which substantially impede effective communication performance (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). The intricate relationship between psychological state and communicative effectiveness underscores the complex emotional landscape of oral presentations.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to identify some difficulties faced by English-majored students at Thang Long University in giving English oral presentations. A quantitative method was used to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the challenges encountered.

3.2. Participants

The participants of the study were 140 English-majored students from different academic years at Thang Long University. The participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across first-year,

second-year, third-year, and fourth-year students. All participants had prior experience with delivering oral presentations as part of their coursework.

3.3. Data collection instruments

A structured questionnaire with Likert-scale questions was designed to gather quantitative data. The questionnaire covered aspects of the challenges students faced, including their linguistic proficiency, background knowledge, and psychological factors.

3.4. Procedure

- **Preparation:** The questionnaire was piloted with 10 students to ensure clarity and reliability. Necessary adjustments were made based on the feedback.
- **Data Collection:** The questionnaire was distributed to 140 participants via an online platform, ensuring anonymity.
- **Data Analysis:** Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages, means, and standard deviations) to identify trends and common difficulties.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the research based on the data collected from the questionnaire in order to categorise the difficulties that English-majored students at Thang Long university encounter regarding oral presentations. Following the analysis, a discussion will be provided to conclude the chapter.

4.1. Results

This section presents the results of the entire research. The final findings are drawn from the analysis of the data collected from 140 participants, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

4.1.1. Students' background

Students' English learning years

The number of years students have spent learning English plays a significant role in their communication skills. It is clear that the longer students study English, the more knowledge they acquire in areas such as vocabulary, grammar, and cultural understanding. Investigating the number of years spent learning English can provide valuable insights into the speaking abilities of English-majored juniors, helping to assess their proficiency. The table below shows the number of years these students have studied English, calculated from this year.

How long have you been studying English?

140 câu trả lời

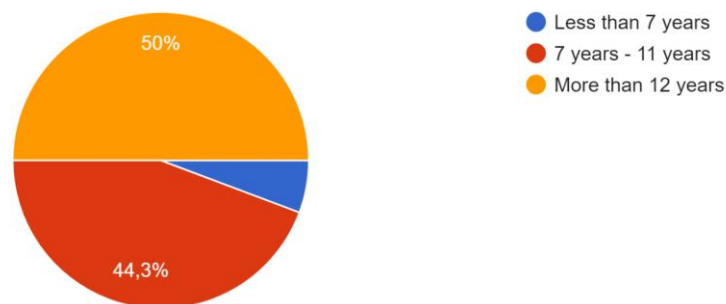


Figure 1: Students' English learning years

According to this figure, half of the respondents have learned English for more than 12 years, which clearly indicates that they started learning the language in primary school. In second place, the percentage of students who have learned English from 7 to 11 years accounts for 44.3%, suggesting that they began learning the language slightly later, around junior high school. On the other hand, the figure for participants who have learned English for less than 7 years constitutes the remaining 6%, meaning they are likely to spend only 3 years in senior high school learning English before entering university.

Students' frequency of making a presentation at the university

How often do you make English oral presentations at the university?

140 câu trả lời

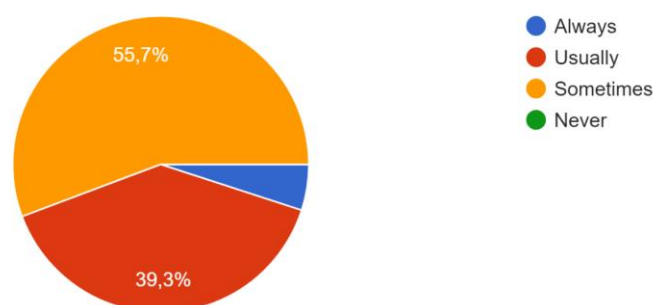


Figure 2: Students' frequency of making presentations at the university

In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on using presentations as a method of assessment in teaching and learning. It provides students with a valuable opportunity to demonstrate their public speaking skills. This pie chart will show the frequency with which students give presentations at the university.

In Figure 2, 55.7% of participants indicated that they sometimes gave presentations at the university, while 39.3% stated that they usually had the chance to present in class. The remaining 5% of students reported that they were always assigned to presentation tasks. This result highlights a significant

achievement, as presentations are viewed as an effective method of assessing students' abilities in higher education.

Students' self-evaluation of their presentation skills

It is important to understand how students assess their own presentation skills. Self-evaluation allows students to recognize their strengths and identify areas for improvement, helping them develop better strategies to enhance their skills. Figure 3 illustrates students' self-assessment of their presentation abilities.

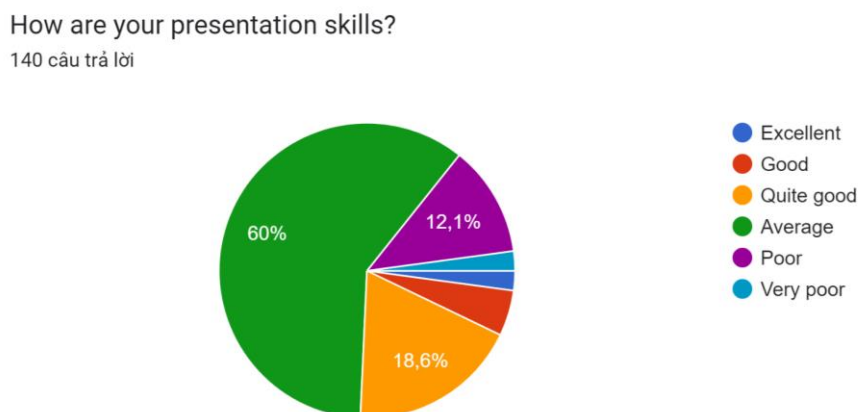


Figure 3: Students' self-evaluation of their presentation skills

Notably, 60% of students rated their presentation skills as average, while nearly 20% considered themselves "quite good." However, just a minority selected "good" or "excellent" when evaluating their abilities compared to about 12% of students who admitted they struggled with making a good presentation, and a very small proportion of 2% chose the "very poor" option. This suggests that English-majored students still face challenges in presenting and appear to lack confidence in their abilities, highlighting the need for further improvement.

Students' frequency of practising their presentation skills

It can be said that practising is a crucial factor in delivering an effective oral presentation. To determine how much time students should dedicate to practising, Question 4 addressed this issue. Based on the results from Figure 4, we can see how often students spend time practising their oral presentations each day.

How often do you spend practicing English oral presentations?
140 câu trả lời

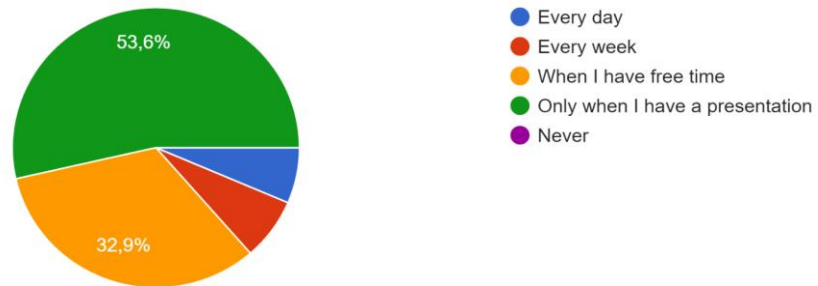


Figure 4: Students' frequency of practising their presentation skills

It is clear that more than half of the respondents only practice when they have a presentation, while 32.9% reported practising during their free time. The percentage of students who practice daily or weekly is much lower, with the figure lying around 7%. The data suggests that students do take practising these skills seriously. However, their efforts were insufficient to improve their presentation skills significantly, as improvement requires consistent practice, effort, and long-term perseverance. This could explain why they still find it difficult to deliver their speeches.

Students' self-evaluation of the difficulties they face when making an oral presentation

Have you faced difficulties when making English oral presentations?
140 câu trả lời

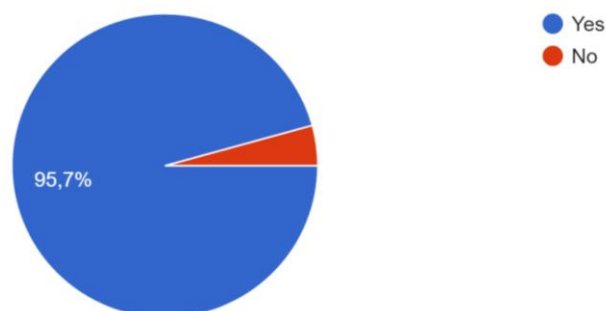


Figure 5.1: Students' self-evaluation of the difficulties they face when making an oral presentation

If Yes, what difficulties do you usually meet in English oral presentations? (you can choose more than one options)

137 câu trả lời

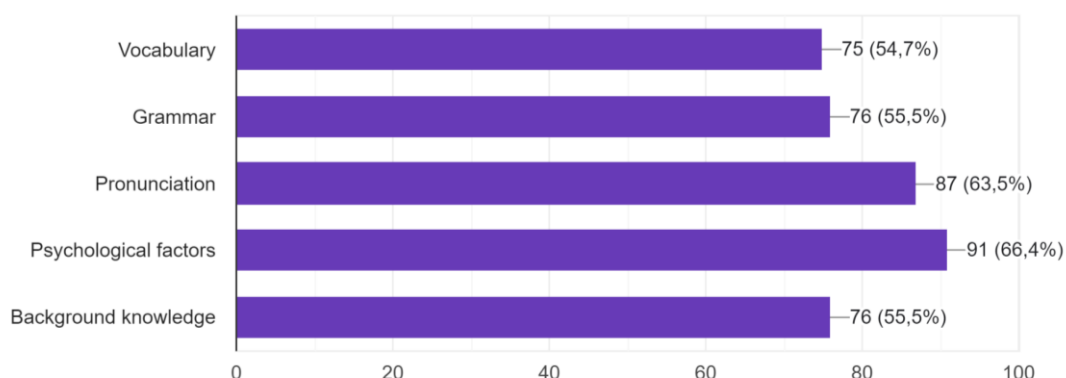


Figure 5.2: Students' self-evaluation of the difficulties they face when making an oral presentation

According to Figure 5.1, it is obvious that most of the respondents believed they experienced difficulties in making an oral presentation, with the figure lying around 95%. In contrast, only an insignificant minority of 4% reported that they did not face any problems in delivering presentations.

Figure 5.2 further reveals that most junior participants identified pronunciation and psychological factors as the primary difficulties in making effective presentations, with around 64% and 66% respectively citing these as challenges. Besides, there was no significant discrepancy in the figure for vocabulary, grammar and background knowledge, with approximately 55% of respondents indicating these as concerns.

4.1.2. Students' problems in making English oral presentations

This section was significant to the research as it aimed to gather more information about students' challenges when delivering presentations. It was divided into three main parts, each addressing a key element: linguistic factors, background knowledge, and psychological factors.

Linguistic factors

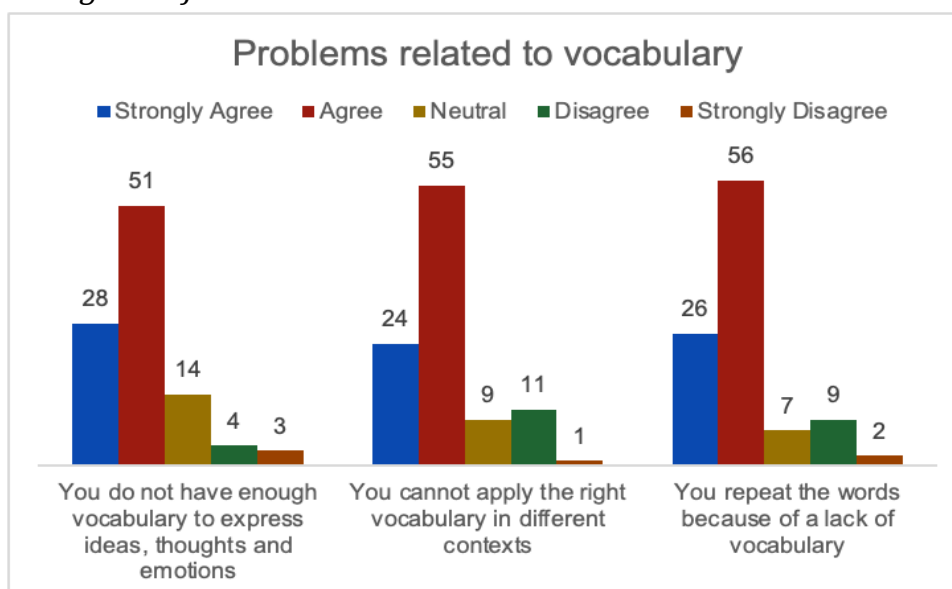


Figure 6: Students' difficulties with vocabulary

It was obvious that just a minority of the learners strongly disagreed with all three above statements, stating the fact that most of them were having issues related to vocabulary factors. Regarding the first statement related to expressing ideas, thoughts and feelings, a significant majority (about 51%) agreed that they lacked sufficient vocabulary to express their ideas during presentations. Additionally, 28% fully agreed, and just 14% remained neutral.

The next statement dealt with the fact that learners cannot flexibly apply the right words and phrases during their presentations. The proportion of participants who consented was up to 55%, and 24% totally agreed. Only 9% of students chose "Neutral" and 11% of them opted for the "Disagree" option.

In the last statement, a large proportion of 82% agreed that they tended to repeat the words multiple times due to limited vocabulary. There were no considerable differences in the figure for the "Neutral" and "Disagree" options, at 7% and 11% respectively.

In conclusion, it can be inferred that vocabulary was a significant obstacle for students when delivering presentations.

Pronunciation plays an indispensable role in presentations, as it directly impacts the overall performance. In fact, clear pronunciation is crucial for effective communication as it ensures that the audience can easily understand the speaker's message (Smiljanić & Bradlow, 2009).

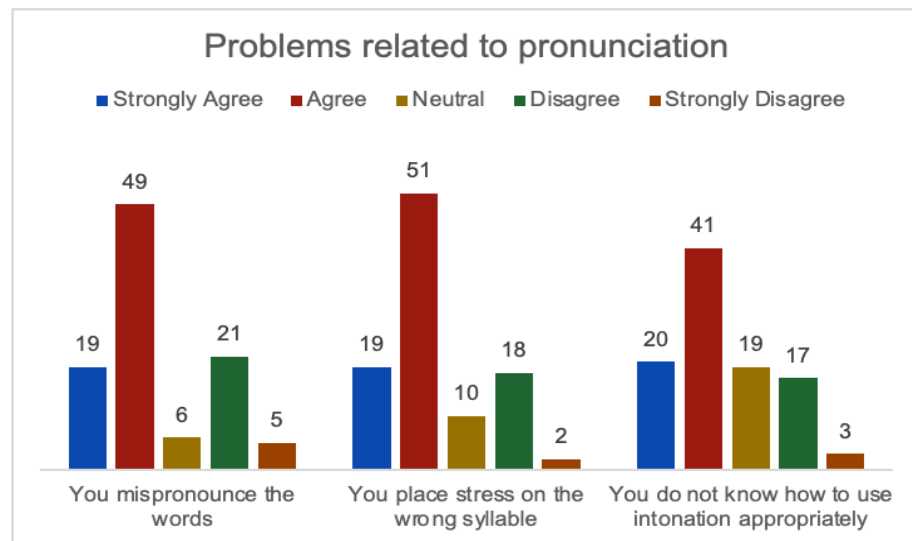


Figure 7: Students' difficulties with pronunciation

The evaluation of participants' pronunciation reveals a significant majority of respondents (68%) acknowledged mispronouncing words, with 19% strongly agreeing and 49% agreeing with the statement. In addition, around 6% remained neutral, and 26% disagreed. This suggests that while most learners struggle with pronunciation issues, there are still some students who experience fewer difficulties in this area.

Regarding the difficulties in placing stress while speaking, 70% of students believed that they tend to place stress on the wrong syllables (19% strongly agreed and 51% agreed). Meanwhile, only a small portion of the respondents had the opposite thought and 10% neither confirmed nor denied having difficulties.

In the last statement regarding the intonation, 41% of the students chose to agree and around 20% strongly agreed. Around 20% of students did not share the same opinion with their peers and 19% gave an undecided response.

To conclude, it is clear that pronunciation poses a significant challenge for students when speaking in public. However, it is also worth noting that some learners remain uncertain about whether their pronunciation affects their presentations. This suggests a need for further awareness or confidence in addressing pronunciation issues.

Grammar also plays an indispensable role in delivering an oral presentation.



Figure 8: Students' difficulties with grammar

Regarding the first statement about students' frequency of making grammatical mistakes, a significant majority agreed (54%), and 20% strongly agreed. While 16% opted for the "disagree" option, there was no significant disparity in the proportion of people who strongly disagreed and remained neutral, with the figure lying in the vicinity of 5%.

The second statement deals with the word order problems that learners may face. To be specific, 44% of respondents consented to this statement, and 29% completely agreed. On the other hand, the participants who had the opposite thought were 21%, and those who did not give any clear answer were 6%.

For the last statement, a remarkable percentage (72%) believed that they were having issues with choosing appropriate grammar structures. In contrast, a total of 24% had the opposite opinion and only an insignificant minority gave an undecided response.

These results suggest that many students continue to struggle with grammar, including sentence structure and choosing appropriate grammar forms, which likely affects their overall communication, such as in presentations. This points to a need for improved grammar instruction and more focused practice in these areas.

Background knowledge

Another factor that students find challenging when making an oral presentation is background knowledge. A strong foundation of relevant information is crucial for delivering a confident and well-informed presentation. Without sufficient background knowledge, students may struggle to explain concepts clearly, answer questions effectively, or engage their audience meaningfully, as confirmed by Swales, J. (2004). Therefore, students need to do thorough research and understand the topic before presenting it to ensure their message is accurate and compelling.

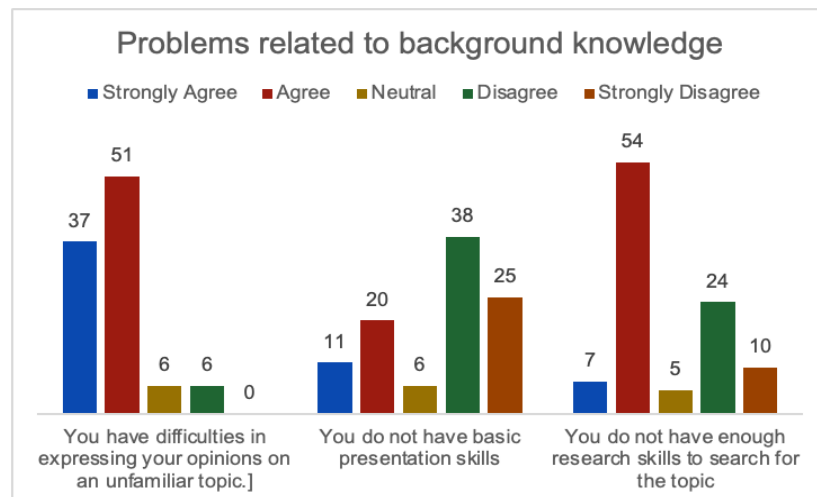


Figure 9: Students' difficulties with background knowledge

The first statement indicates that most students found it challenging to express their opinions on an unfamiliar topic, with 37% strongly agreeing and 51% agreeing. Only 6% disagreed, which was the same proportion as those who neither agreed nor disagreed. It is also notable that no one completely disagreed with the statement.

The second statement, related to their basic presentation skills, saw 31% of students agreeing, while a considerable proportion (63%) disagreed, including 25% who strongly disagreed. These results suggest that most students have received some basic instructions on delivering a proper presentation.

The last statement addresses whether students felt they had sufficient research skills to find information on their topics. A significant proportion (61%) agreed, with 7% strongly agreeing. In comparison, 34% of the students disagreed, and 5% remained neutral.

In general, most contributors believed that their primary difficulty regarding background knowledge lies in expressing their opinions on unfamiliar topics and in finding relevant information on those topics.

Psychological factors

It was believed that psychological factors could also influence students' performance during their presentations. According to McCroskey, J. C. 1984), psychological factors like anxiety can significantly affect students' presentation skills and overall communication performance.

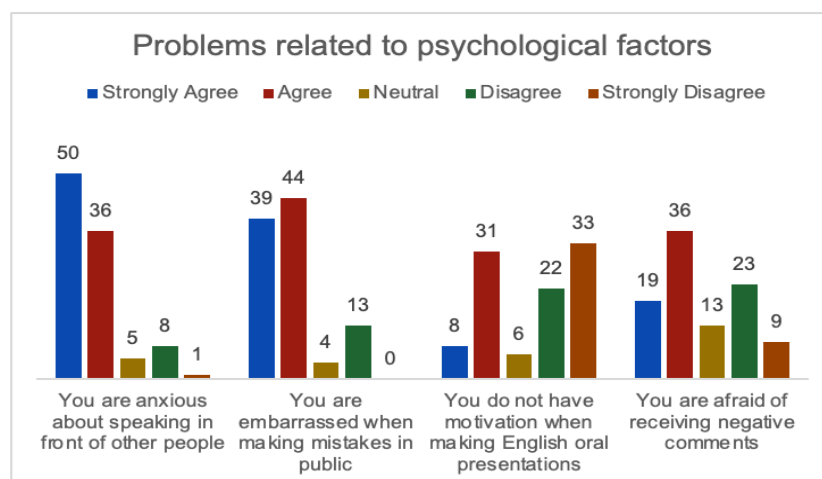


Figure 10: Students' difficulties with psychological factors

The first statement mentioned students' problems related to their anxiety when speaking in front of a large crowd. A significant majority of 50% strongly agreed and 36% agreed with this statement. Meanwhile, only 9% found it difficult to agree and 5% chose to give a clear answer.

Regarding the second statement, nearly 40% of the contributors totally agreed and 44% agreed with the fact that they tended to feel embarrassed when making mistakes in public speaking. Besides, the proportion of students choosing to disagree was triple the percentage of those who remained neutral, at 13% and 4% respectively. It was noteworthy that no one strongly disagreed with this statement.

The reverse pattern was seen in the results of the third statement regarding students' motivation, with a total of 55% opposing this idea, including 22% disagreed and 33% strongly disagreed. This result was slightly higher than the percentage of those who chose to agree, with 8% totally agreeing and 31% agreeing.

The last statement mentioned students' confidence in receiving negative comments when delivering oral presentations. The data recorded a total of 55% students concurred with the fact that they had a tendency to feel afraid of receiving negative feedback. In contrast, 32% of them did not support this idea, which implied that they were not afraid of such feedback on their performance.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

English is a language that many people around the world use to communicate with others, hence this language has become a topic of interest for many students. In reality, to practice communicating effectively in English, one of the best methods is making and delivering a presentation within the classroom setting. English-majored students at Thang Long University believed that public speaking was necessary because it would help them learn English and improve speaking skills. However, during the process of making and

delivering a presentation, they encountered many difficulties, which prevented them from achieving success.

After analysing the important information from English-majored students at Thang Long University, the researchers finally found that there were factors affecting making an oral presentation. Those factors were linguistic, background knowledge and psychological factors. Thanks to precious information from the questionnaire, the researchers could conclude that students' problems were mostly from psychological factors, and linguistic knowledge (vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar). Therefore, they have to make an effort to overcome their problems, involving spending more time practising presentation skills, gaining knowledge of linguistics and different fields in society, and boosting their self-confidence. In general, investigating the problems in making a presentation was a useful way to help English-majored students with their weaknesses in public speaking. From these mentioned problems, they could propose appropriate resolutions for their improvement.

5.2. Implication

The analysed results from the questionnaire showed that most of the participants of this study recognised the vital role of presentation in studying and working. Additionally, English-majored students are aware of their difficulties in making and delivering a presentation related to linguistics (vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar), background knowledge, and psychological factors. The researchers hope that the students realise their weak points so that they can find proper resolutions and suitable learning methods to improve their skills in public speaking and become good speakers. Furthermore, this study is also useful for teachers who want to know about their students' difficulties. Consequently, they can offer their students advice and solutions that help them overcome the mentioned obstacles and improve their skills in the presentation.

REFERENCE

1. Alshare, K., & Hindi, M. (2004). The importance of presentation skill in the classroom: Students and instruction perspectives. *The Consortium for Computing Sciences in Colleges*.
2. Beetham, H., & Sharpe, R. (2013). *Rethinking pedagogy for a digital age: Designing for 21st century learning*. Routledge.
3. Bligh, D. A. (2000). *What's the use of lectures?* Jossey-Bass.
4. Cummins, J. (2008). BICS and CALP: Empirical and theoretical status of the distinction. In N. H. Hornberger (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of language and education* (Vol. 2, pp. 71–83). Springer.
5. Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2015). *Pronunciation fundamentals: Evidence-based perspectives for L2 teaching*. John Benjamins Publishing.

6. Dwyer, K. K., & Davidson, M. M. (2012). Is public speaking anxiety level related to college students' communication skills and career aspirations? *Communication Research Reports*, 29(2), 124–133.
7. Edwards, A., & Westgate, D. (2007). *Investigating classroom talk*. Falmer Press.
8. Elder, C., & McNamara, T. (2007). Language testing and validation. In N. H. Hornberger (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of language and education* (Vol. 7, pp. 993–1005). Springer.
9. Flowerdew, J. (2013). Discourse perspectives on English language education. *Language Teaching*, 46(4), 514–539.
10. Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor Books.
11. Idrus, H. (2016). Enhancing oral presentation skills of ESL students: The use of oral communication strategies. *ResearchGate*.
12. MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language Learning*, 44(2), 283–305.
13. McCroskey, J. C. (1984). The communication apprehension perspective. In J. A. Daly, J. M. Vangelisti, & G. R. Garrison (Eds.), *Current perspectives in communication research* (pp. 23–37). Sage.
14. Schmitt, N. (2010). *Researching vocabulary: A vocabulary research manual*. Palgrave Macmillan.
15. Smiljanić, R., & Bradlow, A. R. (2007). Clear speech intelligibility: Listener and talker effects. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 1(1–2), 221–244.
16. Swales, J. (2004). *Academic writing for graduate students: A course for nonnative speakers of English* (2nd ed.). University of Michigan Press.
17. Zarefsky, D. (2008). Strategic planning in argumentation. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 41(2), 140–159.