

Factors Influencing Pre-Service English Language Teachers' Presentation Skills

*Daniela Myjavec*¹

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Abstract

Being able to express oneself verbally has been a sign of success since ancient Greece. However, expressing oneself accurately, speaking engagingly, and captivating an audience are skills that require continuous development. While some individuals possess an innate "orator", most find their speech influenced by various factors that impact their overall presentation skills. This research aims to ascertain which factors most significantly affect presentation skills in the university preparation of pre-service English language teachers. Although this topic has been studied before, there is a scarcity of data specific to Generation Z and their difficulties in proper self-presentation in a foreign language, particularly within pedagogical research. Besides observation and individual feedback, instruments like the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension and State Trait Anxiety Inventory provided a clearer understanding of students' overall condition.

Keywords: Generation Z, EFL, Presentation Skills, Factors

1 Introduction

Presentation skills, professional speaking, and public speaking are interconnected concepts focused on the ability to communicate effectively with an audience. Although each term may be used in slightly different contexts, they all emphasise the importance of delivering clear, engaging, and purposeful messages. Whether someone is presenting information in a workplace meeting, speaking as an expert in a professional setting, or addressing a general audience from a stage, the fundamental skills involved remain essentially the same.

In recent years, professional speaking has emerged as a popular career path. Like any profession, it entails a specific job description and necessitates extensive study, practice, and preparation, particularly in the field of education.

¹ Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Faculty of Education, Dražovská 4, 949 74, Nitra, Slovakia.

E-Mail: dmyjavec@ukf.sk

In this paper, we will explore the role of professional speaking, its fundamental principles, and the factors that most significantly influence the outcome of a presentation. With a particular focus on the teaching profession, a small-scale research study has been conducted involving a sample of pre-service English language teachers in their first year at the tertiary level of education.

This research aims to identify which factors have the greatest impact on presentation skills during the university preparation of pre-service English language teachers. What are the most common factors that influence presentation effectiveness?

2 Professional Speaking

There are various types of professional speaking. Joanna Penn (2019) primarily explains them from a business perspective and categorises them as follows:

- Keynote or inspirational speaking
- Content speaking
- Workshop presentation and facilitation
- Master of Ceremonies (MC) or event Chair
- Chair of panel or panellist
- Reading or performing your own work

The objective of these events is to entertain, inspire, educate, or coordinate a range of occasions, whether conferences, special events, or everyday gatherings. Their duration can range from just a few minutes to full-day sessions. Additionally, the interaction between the speaker and the audience varies. While inspirational speakers, MCs, and readers typically dominate the speaking time, workshops, conference facilitation, and academic lectures often involve a more dynamic interaction, distributing the speaking time between the presenter and the audience or participants to enhance engagement with the content (Penn, 2019).

Professional speaking, often called public speaking, has one essential element in common: an audience. Regardless of the number of listeners or the level of interaction between the speaker and the audience, this element is crucial in the preparation for any speech. The term "professional" in professional speaking implies that effective speeches require thorough preparation and practice to be beneficial and successful.

The following subsections offer a brief overview of the speech preparation and delivery process to identify factors that may influence public speaking. This is important because public speaking is often cited as one of the leading causes of anxiety and one of people's greatest fears (Dwyer & Davidson, 2012).

2.1 Preparing for Speech

The key principles of preparation include understanding the audience, topic, purposes and central idea, finding materials, organising the outline, creating speaking notes, and practising (Gregory, 2018).

The crucial part of the preparation for presentations or speeches is to know the topic, audience, and objectives. In higher education, students encounter different types of presentations, where topics may be chosen by the student or assigned by the university instructor. From there, we consider the audience, typically consisting of fellow classmates and teachers, and thoroughly think about the objective of the presentation – whether it is to educate and inform, or to entertain and foster better relationships.

When the purpose of the presentation is to inform and educate, finding and studying appropriate materials is essential. We may gather information from various reliable sources, interview knowledgeable individuals, and draw upon our own experiences (Gregory, 2018).

Next, we organise the body of the speech, develop points, and arrange them in a visually appealing manner if using presentation slides as support. A clear introduction and conclusion must be formulated to prepare concise notes for the outline, allowing us to begin practising. This stage of preparation is mostly individual. It involves the technical organisation of thoughts, which is generally not influenced by many external factors, considering that higher education students are familiar with the requirements for university studies (Tucker & LeHew, 2020).

2.2 Delivering Speech

When delivering a speech, many elements come into play simultaneously. Ideally, we as presenters speak fluently and at an appropriate volume while maintaining eye contact and engaging with the audience. We use just the right number of gestures, and our posture is both comfortable and alert. We reference our notes effectively, speak from the heart, and utilize presentation tools, such as slides, appropriately. Our speech is clear, we avoid filler words, and our introduction and conclusion are confident (Gregory, 2018).

Unfortunately, during a speech, these elements can often be inconsistent. A speaker might have a softer voice, resulting in an overly quiet delivery. They may focus too much on their slides and notes, turning their back to the audience. Some presenters might use excessive gestures or rely on verbal fillers, which can disconnect the audience from their message. Additionally, poor posture, such as slouching shoulders, can convey a lack of enthusiasm. Even the opening and closing lines may come across as confusing or unclear (ibid).

3 Factors Influencing Presentation Skills

If we follow all the stages of preparing for a speech and pay attention to the elements of delivering it, the final outcome should be a successful, comprehensible, and engaging presentation. However, the reality is different as there are many factors influencing presentation skills.

3.1 Literature Review

Public speaking and the elements that contribute to an effective presentation have been discussed in research for many years. More recent studies, especially those published after 2016, have begun to explore how new generations of students—such as Generation Z—develop their presentation skills. While oral presentation ability remains an essential learning outcome in higher education, there is still ongoing debate about which learning conditions best support its development. Existing research suggests that factors such as personality traits, preparation, audience interaction, and language proficiency all play a major role in shaping students' presentation performance (Razawi et al., 2019).

For example, many students experience fear when presenting in English, particularly in EFL settings, which shows how closely language skills are linked to confidence during presentations (Algouzi et al., 2023). This fear is often reinforced by issues related to content preparation, delivery techniques, and moment-to-moment confidence often affected by the anengagement of audinece, which together can increase overall anxiety (Alshiabani & Algraini, 2024).

From our own teaching experience in the Presentation Skills course, we have consistently observed that fear, anxiety, and stress are among the most common barriers students face when presenting. Our 2024 pilot study supports this observation, as do larger longitudinal studies conducted by researchers such as Tóth (2024) and Szyska (2024). Their findings highlight that emotional factors, especially anxiety, have a major impact on speaking and presentation performance. These pressures often lead students to rely heavily on their slides or scripts, a pattern frequently reported among EFL learners.

This connection between emotional state and language performance demonstrates the importance of creating supportive learning environments that reduce anxiety and help students build confidence (Octaberlina et al., 2022). Research further shows that personality traits, such as self-esteem, inhibition, and willingness to take risks, along with external conditions like preparation time or available support, also shape how successfully students communicate orally (Bata & Castro, 2021).

Overall, a variety of factors influence presentation performance. Some lie completely outside the speaker's control, others are partially shaped by both the speaker and the environment, and some depend entirely on the speaker's own actions and preparation.

4 Factors Influencing Pre-service English Language Teachers' Presentation Skills

4.1 Methodology

The aim of the research was to find out what factors influence pre-service English Language teachers' presentation skills and their perceptions of public speaking.

The research was conducted during the summer semester, i.e., 12 weeks in 2025, in the course Presentation skills, which is a compulsory course for students in the single major English Language and Literature teacher training programme.

The sample consisted of bachelor students in the first year of English language and literature teacher training programme. It was a mixed group of 11 students aged 18-19. The participants were an availability-based sample.

Full-time students must complete a total of 75 hours per semester, including 25 hours of in-class seminars. The course aims to teach students the fundamentals of creating and delivering presentations in English, fostering clear, well-structured performances, and confidently managing and presenting their work to an audience. Beyond practising presentation skills, the course also addresses critical thinking regarding information and text, effective audience communication, and strategies for managing anxiety.

As anxiety has played a significant role in speaking and presentation skills, as mentioned in chapter 2, the State Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberg, 1989), consisting of 20 self-report items on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 - not at all to 4 - very much so, measures only state anxiety, which is a temporary state influenced by the current situation. The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24), comprising 24 statements on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 - strongly agree to 5 - strongly disagree, assesses feelings about communication with others, with a focus on public speaking for the needs of this research (McCroskey, 2005).

To answer our research questions, observation and a non-formal anonymous questionnaire about their feelings, course expectation fulfilment, or other factors helped us form results.

4.2 Results

In the analysis of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, out of 12 students, 4 students exhibited high levels of anxiety with an average score of 49.3. Additionally, 3 students displayed low anxiety levels with an average score of 35, while 5 students had moderate anxiety levels, scoring an average of 44.2.

In terms of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension, all 11 students scored between 51 and 80, indicating average communication apprehension. Moreover, upon further examination of questions 19 to 24, which pertained to their attitudes toward public

speaking and their feelings when delivering a speech, all students scored above 14 and below 24, reflecting moderate apprehension.

By observing students' presentations and delivery, their reactions and self-assessments, and teacher feedback and recommendations, we have identified groups of factors that lie along a spectrum. On one end, there are factors that we cannot change, such as the topic, the audience, and innate traits connected to personality, like natural intelligence and tendencies toward anxiety.

On the opposite end, we find factors that can be controlled, such as preparation, practice, and the technical tools used. Somewhere in between these extremes is a combination of external influences and personal efforts, including language abilities, culture, family upbringing, education, and teacher support. These factors range from those we have little to no control over to those that depend entirely on our attitude and effort.

Students' feedback on the course was mostly positive, with participants indicating that it effectively improved their understanding of posture, boosted their confidence, enhanced their skills in working with presentation slides, and provided strategies for preparation. Despite these confidence gains, students expressed a desire to address further issues related to stress and anxiety, as consistently highlighted in the submitted questionnaires. Many respondents emphasised that both preparation and the audience significantly influence their anxiety levels. Notably, a few students mentioned that although the initial minutes of the presentation can be anxiety-inducing, this apprehension tends to decrease once they realise their audience consists mainly of friends and acquaintances.

Anxiety is a prevalent concern among students. Consequently, we sought to explore whether factors such as parental upbringing, educators' influence, and cultural context affect presentation skills. Responses varied; some students dismissed these factors as overly simplistic, attributing their experiences primarily to intrinsic personality traits. In contrast, a subset of respondents reported that support from family and reactions from teachers significantly influence their feelings of confidence or anxiety throughout their lives, extending beyond the context of presentation skills.

4.3 Limitations

Like the previous year, when we conducted similar research in the same course (Myjavec, 2025), we faced a limited number of students, which restricted the scope of our findings. It was beyond our control to influence the number of students applying for the course.

One limitation noted from our perspective was the low level of English language skills among participants, performing below B1 levels.

We believe that research with a small sample can function as a pilot study, which is valuable for guiding future research design and methodology to obtain more reliable results.

5 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to identify the factors that most significantly affect presentation skills in the university preparation of pre-service English language teachers. Previous research by Myjavec (2025) highlighted the role of anxiety in this context. Additionally, other studies from neighbouring countries have focused on anxiety and strategies to manage it in order to improve presentation skills (Tóth, 2024; Wu et. al, 2024).

In our small-scale research, we initially found that students tend to attribute challenges in presentation skills mainly to anxiety. Despite the results showing moderate anxiety levels and average communication apprehension, most students considered preparation to be a vital factor in mastering their presentations. Furthermore, as students practised and followed the course plan, they began to realise that preparation, a factor within their control, significantly helps to reduce feelings of anxiety. On the other hand, one uncontrollable factor, the audience, affects presentation skills and helps decrease their anxiety levels.

We want to emphasise that while presentation skills are not synonymous with teaching ability, they are highly important for pre-service English language teachers. The role of a teacher encompasses various responsibilities, including being a speaker, mediator, presenter, and facilitator, all of which are closely linked to effective oral presentation skills.

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