Is There a Relationship between Communications Strategies and Fear of Oral Presentation?

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Abstract
The ability to communicate clearly and effectively contributes significantly to presentation success. Unfortunately, communication barriers can prohibit students from accurately conveying and accepting the messages by others to exchange their knowledge, opinions, and ideas. Previous research evidence has indicated that many students experience fear in oral presentation. This study aims to explain the influence in communication strategies and fear of oral presentation among the postgraduate students in public university. This quantitative survey was used towards 41 respondents who participated in this study. There are three sections in the instrument in which section A consists of the demographic profile and Section B has 25 items on communication strategies and section C has 14 items on causes of fear. This study found that in communication strategies there are five strategies that could help the students to strategize their presentation through social-affective strategies, fluency-oriented strategies, negotiation for meaning strategies, accuracy-oriented strategies, and message reduction, orientation and non-verbal strategies. While fear of oral presentation can stem from two sources and there are external and internal factors, the external factors such as fear of the marks that they will receive and the internal factors such as feeling nervous are the most feared factors among the all factors that the students' faced. This study has successfully proven the similarity of previous scholars' findings through the findings from recent studies. Therefore, it is very significant to continue the research in future due to different challenges and constraints in performing oral presentations. By identifying problems and challenges through comprehensive research, solutions can be improved over time.
Keywords: Communication, Strategies, Oral Presentation, Internal Fear, External Fear

Introduction

Background of Study

Communication strategies can be used as a systematic technique to assist students in overcoming communication difficulties, which may boost their self-confidence during presenting their material in front of the public. Communication strategies are also seen as important in assisting the postgraduate students specifically to overcome communication challenges in conversation and make their messages more understandable to the audience who listened to their presentation (Yousef et al., 2013). In oral presentations, good oral communication skills are essential. The ability to communicate clearly and effectively contributes significantly to presentation success. Communication does not rely solely on speaking abilities; understanding is also required to ensure that the message is understood by the receiver or audience (Tian & Mahmud, 2018). A communications strategy also refers to a strategy for reaching out to the specific target audience. It includes to whom we are talking to, why we talked to them, how and when we will talk to them, the format of the content, and the channels we will use to share it (Tariq, 2021).

Since the oral presentation has been used commonly as one of the assessment tools in academic institutions all over the world, it has also been used as a platform to encourage the students to communicate their needs, ideas and opinions. Thus, to function effectively in a professional setting in the age of globalization, graduates must be proficient in oral communication skills. Since oral presentations require a variety of skills, a carefully planned and constructed guideline will aid in the development of students (Zivkoviy, 2014). Unfortunately, the common practice assessment of oral presentation has invited fear or anxiety to the students who have not had the competency to face the challenge. In fact, Raja (2017) agreed that many people are shy or afraid of speaking in front of their peers or familiar people and in front of unfamiliar audiences. Previous research evidence has indicated that many students experience fear in public speaking. There are various causes mentioned by the previous scholars that triggered the fear among students, anxiety is one of them.

The lack of communication skills among Malaysian students has become a national issue. The English language is used in a variety of ways in Malaysian education. It is the academic lingua franca, as well as a language of communication, instruction, and communication. The university's role in producing graduates in various fields to meet market demands focuses not only on academic achievement, but also on the soft skills in order to compete in the global market (Iksan et al., 2012). Although there is an emphasis on Bahasa Melayu in the lives of Malaysians, English is given recognition in education policy and planning as a 'second language' (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2014). In Malaysia, the expertise of the ESL is crucial if it wants to establish a generation of global communication. This reflects the country's goal of becoming a fully developed country.

In Malaysian context, most higher education institutions use this language as the medium of instruction to promote their students' mastery of English (Ab Halim & Ab Halim, 2013). However, the majority of students whose first language is not English will have difficulty mastering the language during their study especially when they have to make an oral presentation. Most of the studies show that communication strategies have been proven to have a significant effect on language performance but very little mentioned its relationship with the fear of oral presentation.

Statement of Problem

Oral presentation skills are necessary to improve a student's ability to communicate publicly in the target language. Having a good communication skill can help students to be better prepared to communicate more effectively and confidently in their target language. Communication and presenting skills can be improved in a variety of ways. The need for speaking skills for communication and effective communication should be prioritized (Tridinanti, 2018). In order to ensure that there is no or little communication breakdown, numerous specialists have developed effective plans and techniques to aid in improving people's communication and presentation. The use of oral communication strategies has proven effective in helping students overcome their fear of oral presentations (Belaman et. al., 2022).

Effective communication can be done by breaking down barriers to convey clear and concise messages. However, communication barriers can prohibit students from accurately conveying and accepting the messages by others to exchange their knowledge, opinions, and ideas. The three main obstacles to efficient communication are ethnocentrism, perception, and language. Efforts are needed by the speakers to think about each one and how to build a bridge with the audience rather than adding to a barrier (Chang, 2015). Overcoming barriers by implementing the right communication strategies can lead to an effective communication even in oral presentation (Shukla, 2022). Internal barriers are obstacles that exist within us that affect our thinking, attitude, perceptions, and communication style. External barriers are obstacles that are not caused by us, such as those caused by other people or the environment (Seekhle Learning, 2018). Hence, this study aims to explain the influence between communications strategies and fear of oral presentation among the postgraduate students in public university.

Research Question
- How do communication strategies influence learners' oral presentation?
- How do external and internal causes influence fear of oral presentation?

Literature Review
Features of Communication Strategies

Previous research in the field of communication strategies revealed that English speaking proficiency influences the use of communication strategies (Masithoh et al., 2018). Most of non-native English learners appear to have problems communicating effectively in English. The fear of communicating in English is still common among the non-native speakers of English due to many reasons. A study conducted by Ahmad et al (2022) among 51 undergraduate students in a public university found that most of the students were inclined to use more strategies in influencing their oral presentation. This may be caused not only by the lack of basic English grammar and vocabulary but also by deficiency in the use of appropriate Communication Strategies (CSs) for many communicative contexts.

In addition, Yaman & Kavasoglu (2013) argued most second and foreign language students would experience difficulties in speaking ability as they lack sufficient linguistic knowledge to maintain a conversation in communication contexts. Apart from that, they lack the ability to use language correctly (i.e linguistic competence), sociolinguistic and strategic

competence, which are the components of communicative competence (Yaman & Kavasoglu, 2013).

Hence, to address the challenge of communicative competence among the non-native English language learners, the use of a Communication Strategies or CSs is important to guide non-native English language learners' effective speaking or oral presentation ability. The reason being is that the CSs will guide non-native English language learners to overcome barriers and difficulties in communication (Yaman & Kavasoglu, 2013). In fact, the issues raised the concern for the universities to teach the non-native English learners on the CSs as ways to improve their communication effectiveness.

It is important to classify the main features of the CSs in English language learning. Many scholars have defined CSs in various types and definitions. Yaman & Kavasoglu (2013) have classified CSs into two major perspectives: the interactional view and psycholinguistic view. The interactional view of CSs is based on the interaction process between language learners and their interlocutors for negotiation of meaning. Originally, the interactional view of CSs is originated in the work of (Tarone, 1980). Tarone (1980) defined the CSs as follows:

"CSs are tools used in negotiation of meaning where both interlocutors are attempting to agree as to a communicative goal and a shared enterprise in which both the speaker and the hearer are involved rather than being only the responsibility of the speaker". (p.424).

Hence, the interactional views considered CSs as a mutual attempt by participants in a communicative situation to maintain communication. In short, Tarone (1980), from the perspective of interactional view, classifies CSs as approximation, word coinage, circumlocution, literal translation, language switch, appeal for assistance, mime and avoidance (Yaman & Kavasoglu, 2013).

On the other hand, in the psycholinguistic view; CSs are considered as a cognitive process of the speaker himself or herself with a focus on comprehension and production. Faerch and Kasper (1984) defined CSs in terms of the individual's mental response to a problem rather than as a joint response by two people, which means that CSs deal with language production problems that occur at the planning stage. Therefore, the psycholinguistic view of CSs has been mainly associated with strategies for overcoming limitations in lexical knowledge. Due to this, Faerch and Kasper (1984) had proposed two strategies in general for solving a communication problem: avoidance strategies and achievement strategies. The avoidance strategies include formal reduction strategies and functional reduction strategies on the contrary the achievement strategies consist of compensatory strategies and retrieval strategies.

Hence, these two main features of CSs have been discussed by Yaman & Kavasoglu's (2013) works well to explain that CSs adopted by non-native English learners to cope with their fear or ability to communicate effectively and resort to ways for overcoming limitations or difficulties in speaking the English language.

Causes of Fear of Oral Presentation

It is standard practice to give university students an oral presentation evaluation to gauge their ability to communicate ideas and evaluate their cognitive knowledge in a manner other than writing. Grieve et al (2021) shows that students do not enjoy participation in oral presentations. Often, it has invited fear or anxiety among students who have not had the competency to face the challenge. Reciprocally, Rahman (2022) defines public speaking anxiety as a specific social situation that arises from an anticipated enactment of an oral presentation. Other terms used interchangeably include glossophobia, which is the fear of public speaking or speaking in general (Hancock et al., 2010), stage fright (Bippus et al., 1999), communication apprehension (McCroskey et al., 1984) or public speaking anxiety (Bodie, 2010). The fear of communicating orally and public speaking anxiety have long been accepted as psychological phenomena. Daly (1991) noted that the fear of giving a speech in public exceeded even such phobias as the fear of snakes, elevators, and heights.

The scenario of such fear can be explained by internal and external factors, as Rahmat (2019) categorised as trait and state apprehension. Trait apprehensions are internal barriers or obstacles that exist within us that affect our thinking, attitude, perceptions, and communication style. It can be described as students' fear about their own performance during a speech, which includes fears about their own recall of information or their inability to remember presentation content during a speech (LeFebvre, LeFebvre, and Allen, 2018). Some reasons include uncertainty about and comprehending topics, students' readiness, and linguistic knowledge. On the other hand, state apprehensions are external barriers and obstacles not caused by us, such as those caused by other people or the environment. The actual fear of oral presentation arises from an external fear of the audience's responses. It is related to perceived attitudes from the audience towards the speaker. These perceived attitudes that students found challenging included judgement from the audience, being the focus of attention and no interaction from the audience. Raja (2017) explained that many people are shy or afraid to speak in front of their peers or familiar people and in front of unfamiliar audiences.

Past Studies
Past Studies on the Use on Communication Strategies

Many studies have been done to investigate the use of communication strategies, especially for comprehension and problem-solving purposes. The study by Su (2021) is done to investigate college students' oral communication strategies. The sample consists of 333 students with non-English majors at a private university in Taiwan. Data collection includes two questionnaires using moderations of the Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI) and the Communication Apprehension Subscale (CAS). Findings reveal that the sample often uses communication strategies when they cannot explain the meaning of their intended utterance. Therefore, they often employ message abandonment, non-verbal, and social effective strategies in this situation.

Next, the study by Gomez and Larenas (2020) looked at the frequency of use of communicative strategies used by English learners to deal with difficulties in understanding oral messages (listening skills). The sample consists of 542 university students. Similar to Su (2021), this study also uses the OCSI questionnaire for data collection, with data analysis done through descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings reveal that students often use

communication strategies to reduce comprehension problems when learning a new language by using consultation for meaning, non-verbal and word-oriented strategies.

Further, Masithoh et al (2018) investigate the use of communication strategies from the perspective of language proficiency because the most significant predictor of specific communication strategy use is language proficiency. The sample consists of twelve students, comprising of six students with a high proficiency level and six with a low proficiency level, who are second-year students in the English Education Department of one of the universities in Indonesia. This qualitative study employs the observation, interview, and documentation method to collect data. The findings show that the sample frequently employs communication strategies in order to survive in communication. High-proficient students often utilized higher communication strategies such as avoidance or reduction strategies, achievement or compensatory strategies, stalling or time-gaining strategies, self-monitoring strategies, and interactional strategies. Low-proficient students often use similar communication strategies to those used by higher-proficient students. However, findings found that they don't often use the self-monitoring strategies.

Past Studies on Fear of Oral Presentation
Studies done by Grieve et al (2021) have explored student's fears experienced and strategies used by students who fear public speaking, including oral presentations. A qualitative survey was gathered from 46 undergraduate and postgraduate students with a fear of public speaking from the University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol. They found six causes that triggered the fear of oral presentation among students such as fear of being judged, physical symptoms, uncertainty about the topic, negative effect on university experience, practice and preparation, and more practical support needed. According to their findings, adequate student support in public speaking would necessitate cross-institutional communication and collaboration, as well as input from wellbeing services, library services, study skills units, academic tutors, and individual programmes. Another study also aims to look into the factors that may cause anxiety during oral presentations in English and to identify the coping strategies they use (Arumugan et al., 2021). The quantitative approach has been applied in the study with 300 Malaysian undergraduates from three public universities as respondents. The findings revealed that during English oral presentations, respondents frequently experience negative emotions, physical symptoms, and anxiety about making mistakes. The findings also revealed that language ability, audience reaction, and teacher feedback all influenced undergraduates' anxiety during oral presentations in English. Undergraduates cope with their anxiety by attempting to comprehend the subject matter and preparing ahead of time as part of their coursework.

Next quantitative study was done by Najah and Ilham (2021) that also sought to determine the level of public speaking anxiety and the relationship between students' public speaking anxiety in oral presentation class and English-speaking classroom performance among Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam undergraduates. This study included 150 students from Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam who were chosen at random. The findings revealed that the majority of respondents had a moderate level of anxiety. Despite having good academic results, most respondents experienced speaking anxiety during public speaking or oral presentations.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The use of communication strategies is used to facilitate communication in the classroom setting. However, some learners may have difficulties communicating due to many reasons. One of the reasons is anxiety. Anxiety in learning may snowball to affect other performance and achievement in other learning areas (Rahmat, 2020). This cycle of fear (Rahmat, et.al, 2022) can hinder learners' use of communication strategies in the long run. The current study explores the different types of communication strategies and the reasons why learners fear oral presentations.

This study (refer to figure 1) is rooted from communication strategies (cs) by (Yaman & Kavasoglu, 2013). They presented five communication strategies. The first one is (i) social affective strategies and they involve strategies that learners use to reduce their anxieties. They can be asking questions, emphasising with others, or even cooperating with their peers. Next, (ii) fluency-oriented strategies are related to fluency to communicate. This is when the speakers attempt to speak fluently to get their message across. The third (iii) strategy is negotiation for meaning strategies and they include comprehension checks, clarification requests, confirmation checks, word coinage, use of approximation, self-repetition, other repetition, correction, and non-verbal expression of non-understanding. The fourth strategy is (iv) accuracy-oriented strategies and they include the speaker demonstrating the ability to use necessary vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation correctly. The last strategy is message reduction, orientation, and non-verbal strategies and there could be some ways speakers use to communicate without speaking such as using facial expressions, hand gestures, eye contact or even body language.

This framework in figure 1, entails the relationship between communication strategies and the fear of oral presentation. According to Endler (1980), fear of oral presentation can stem from two sources and they are (i) external and (ii) internal factors. Some past studies have revealed that students are highly motivated by external factors more than internal factors (Lokman et. al., 2021).
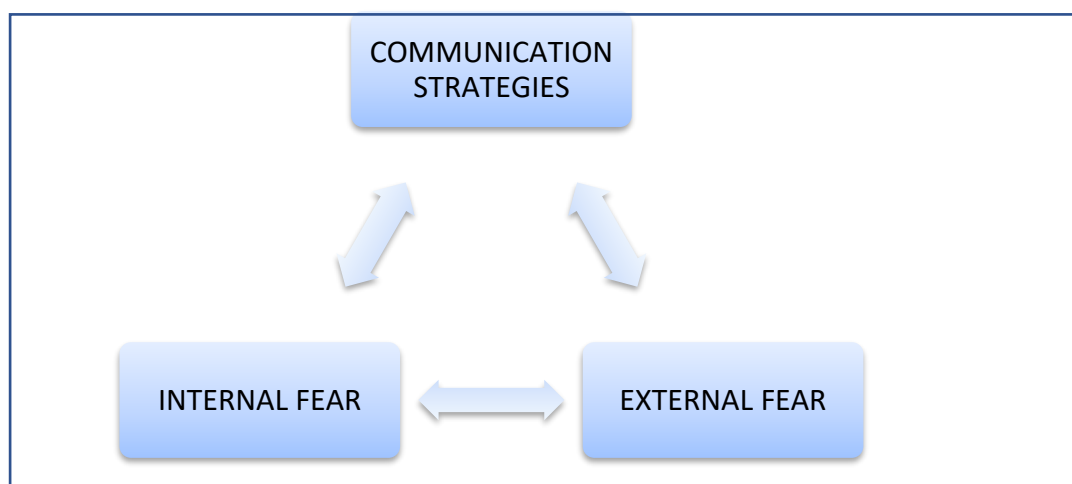

Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study-The Relationship between Communication Strategies and Fear of Oral Presentation

Methodology
This quantitative study is done to investigate the influence in communication strategies and fear of oral presentation among the postgraduate students. 41 respondents have participated in this study. The 5-likert scale instrument used a survey adapted from (Yaman & Kavasoglu, 2013). Table 1 shows the distribution of items in the survey. Section A is the demographic profile. Section B has 25 items on communication strategies and section C has 14 items on causes of fear.

Table 1
Distribution of Items in Survey

SECTION	VARIABLE	SUB-COMPONENT	NO OF ITEMS
B	Communication Strategies (Yaman & Kavasoglu, 2013)	Social-Affective Strategies	6
		Fluency-Oriented Strategies	6
		Negotiation For Meaning Strategies	4
		Accuracy Oriented Strategies	5
		Message Reduction, Orientation and Non-Verbal Strategies	5
		Total For Communication Strategies	25
C	Causes Of Fear (Endler, 1980)	External Factors	7
		Internal Factors	7
		Total For Fear	14
	Total Number of Items		40

Table 2
Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.883	40

Table 2 shows the reliability statistics for the survey. SPSS analysis revealed a Cronbach alpha of .883 thus revealing a high reliability of the instrument used. Data is then analysed to reveal mean scores to answer all the research questions for this study.

Findings
Demographic Profile
As shown in Figure 2, many of the respondents were female students, which made up 85 %. This is proportionate to the number of gender differences in the program. While figure 3 shows that the majority of the students are in the age range of 21 to 25 years old (68%), followed by 32% from 26 to 30 years old.
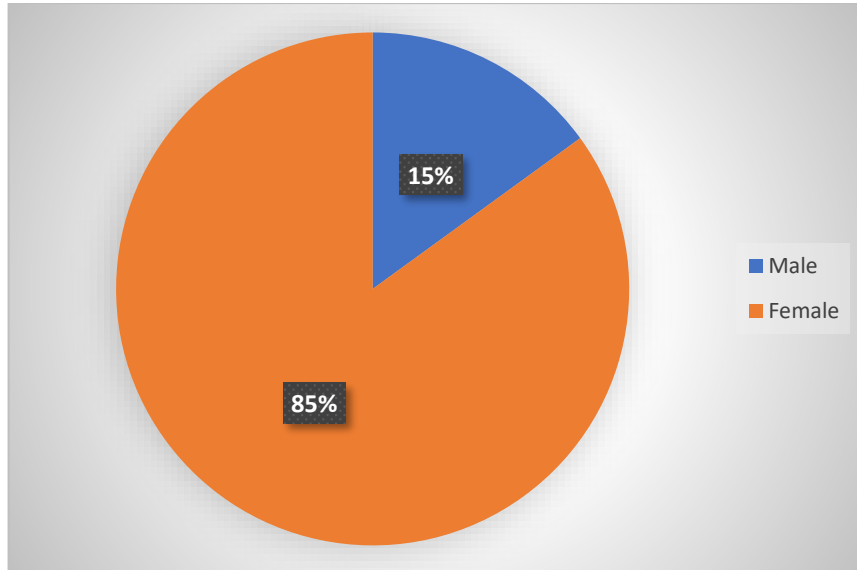
Q1. Gender

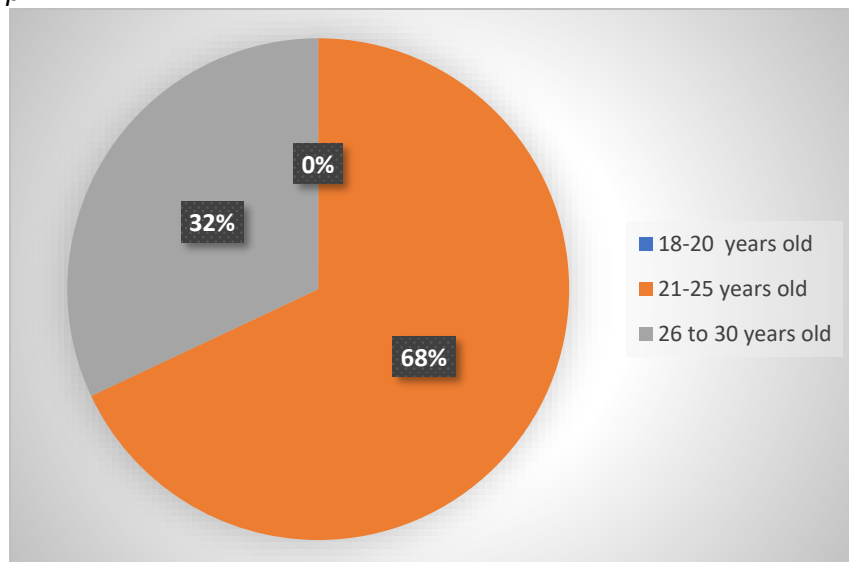Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

Q2. Age Group

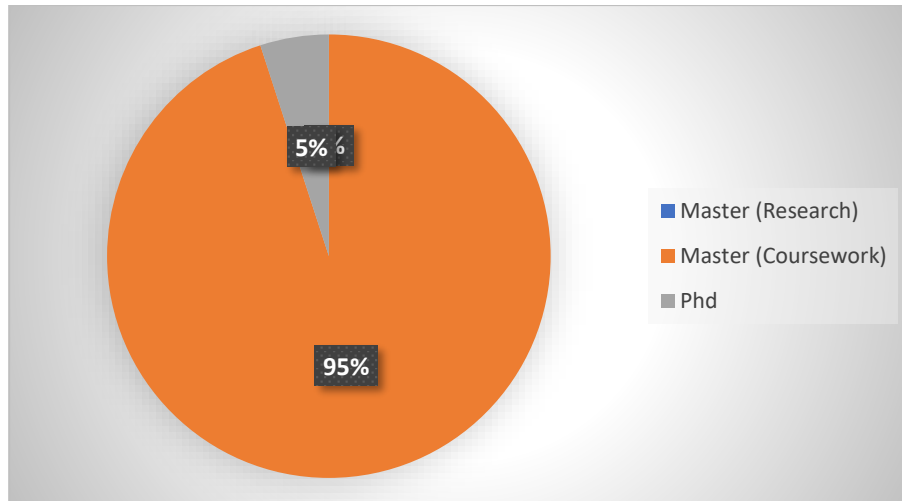Figure 3- Percentage for Age Group

Q3. Program

Figure 4- Percentage for Program

In figure 4 in this study, it was found that 95% of the students are undergoing a master's program by coursework. In addition, 5 percent of them are following a PhD program.
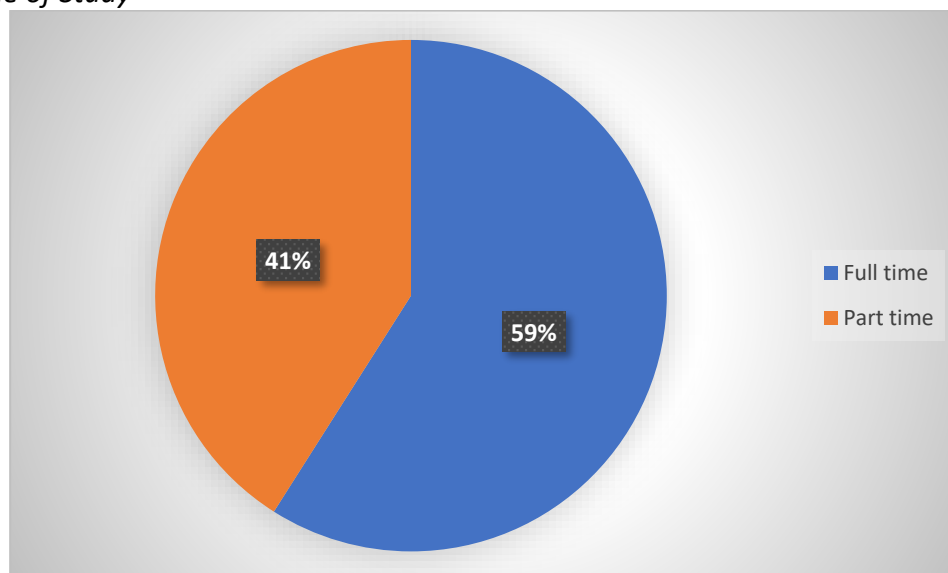
Q4. Mode of Study

Figure 5- Percentage for Mode of Study

As shown in Figure 5, the majority of the respondents were full time students that made up 59%, whilst only 41% of the respondents were part time students.
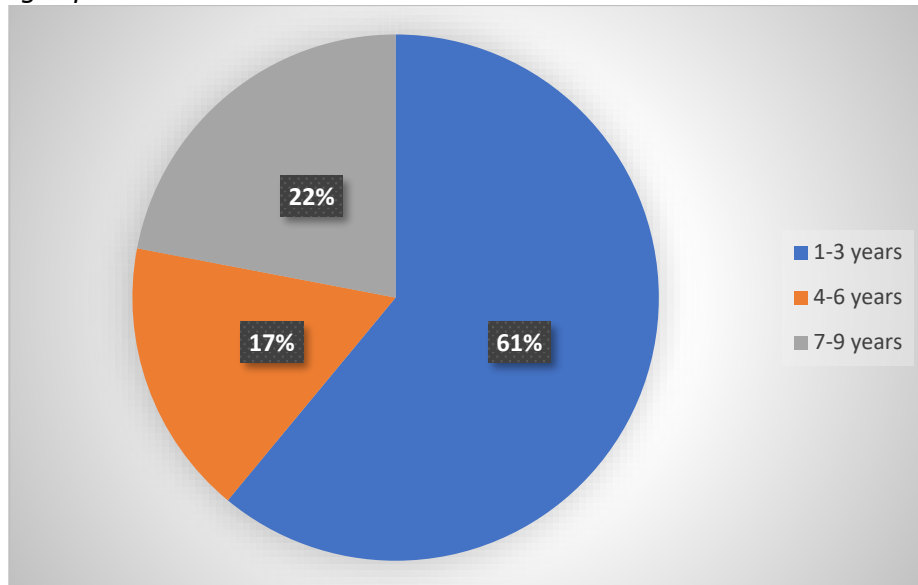
Q5. Working Experience

Figure 6- Percentage for Working Experience

As shown in Figure 6, the majority of the respondents (61%) had 1-3 years of working experiences, whilst the minority of the respondents (22%) had 7-9 years of working experiences. Only 17% of the respondents had 4-6 years of working experience.

Findings for Communication Strategies

This section presents data to answer research question 1: How do communication strategies influence learners' oral presentation? In the context of this study, communication strategies can be categorized into; (i) social-affective strategies, (ii) fluency oriented strategies, (iii) negotiation for meaning strategies, (iv) accuracy-oriented strategies, and (v) message reduction, orientation and non-verbal strategies.
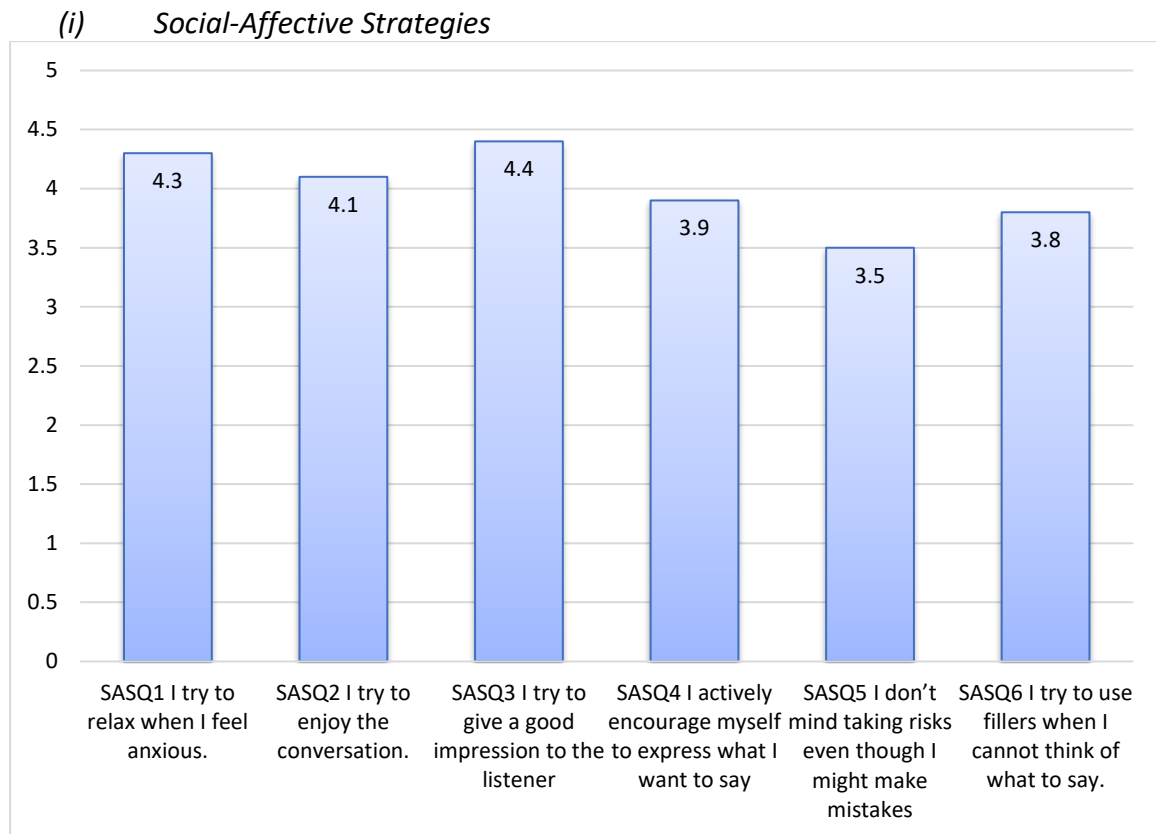
(i)   Social-Affective Strategies

Figure 7-Mean for Social-Affective Strategies

Figure 7 presents the mean for Social-Affective strategies. The item "I try to give a good impression to the listener" has the highest mean of 4.4. Followed by the item "I try to relax when I feel anxious" had a mean of 4.3. The item "I try to enjoy the conversation" had a mean of 4.1. The item "I actively encourage myself to express what I want to say" had a mean of 3.9. The item "I try to use fillers when I cannot think of what to say" had a mean of 3.8. While the item "I don't mind taking risks even though I might make mistakes" had the lowest mean 3.5.
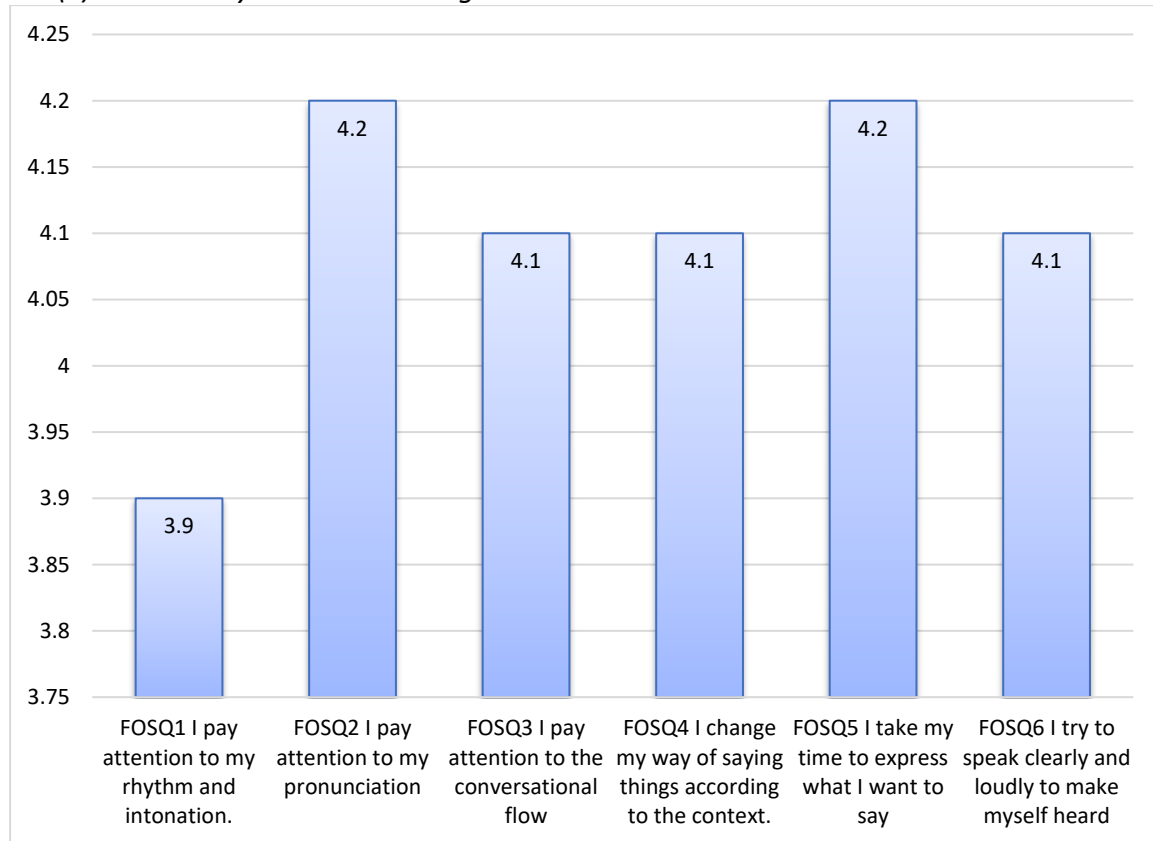
(ii)   Fluency Oriented Strategies

Figure 8-Mean for Fluency Strategies

Figure 8 presents the mean for fluency strategies. The item "I pay attention to my pronunciation" and item "I take my time to express what I want to say" both had a highest mean of 4.2. While the item "I pay attention to my rhythm and intonation" had a lowest mean of 3.9.
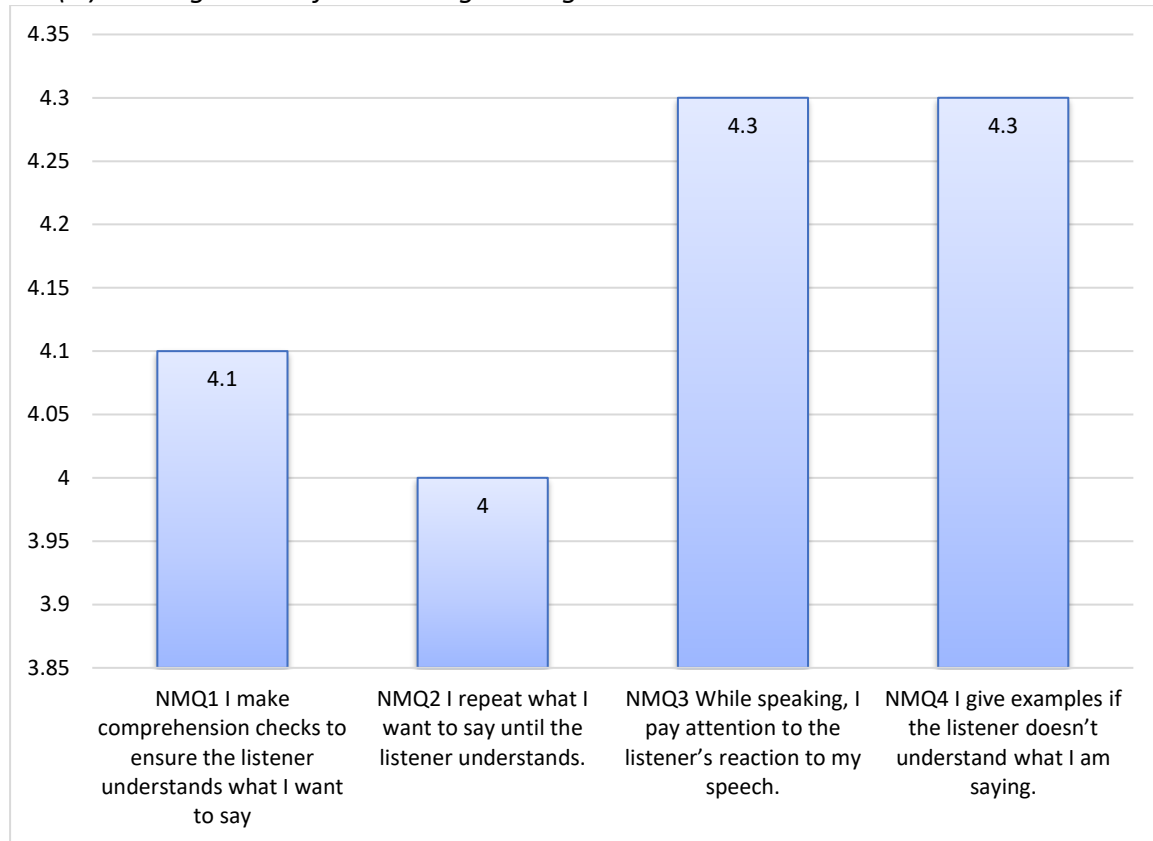
(iii)   *Negotiation for Meaning Strategies*

Figure 9-Mean for Negotiation for Meaning Strategies

Figure 9 represents the mean for negotiation for meaning strategies. The item "While speaking, I pay attention to the listener's reaction to my speech" and "I give examples if the listener doesn't understand what I am saying" has the highest mean of 4.3. Followed by the item "I make comprehension checks to ensure the listener understands what I want to say" which had a mean of 4.1. While the item "I repeat what I want to say until the listener understands" had the lowest mean of 4.
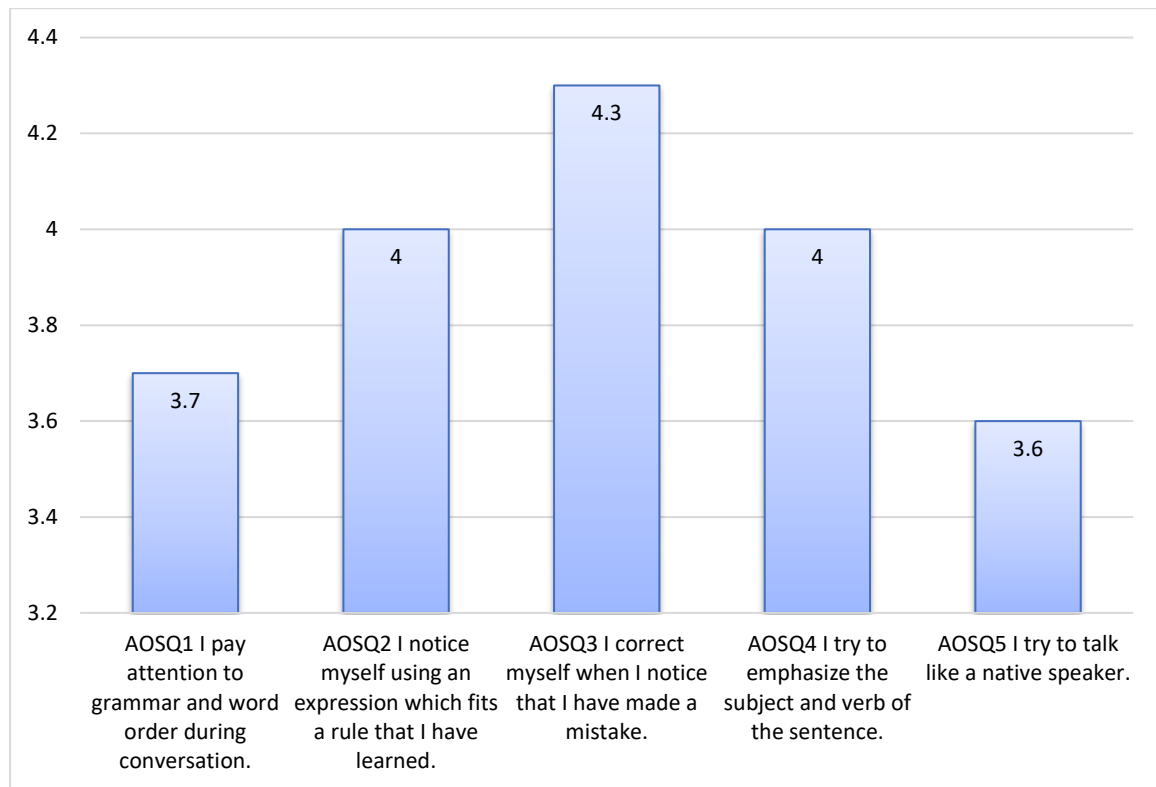
(iv)   Accuracy Oriented Strategies

Figure 10-Mean for Accuracy Oriented Strategies

Figure 10 presents the mean for accuracy-oriented strategies. The item "I correct myself when I notice that I have made a mistake" has the highest mean of 4.3. Followed by the item "I notice myself using an expression which fits a rule that I have learned" which had a mean of 4. Similarly, the item "I try to emphasize the subject and verb of the sentence" also had a mean of 4. The item "I pay attention to grammar and word order during conversation" had a mean of 3.7. While the item "I try to talk like a native speaker" had the lowest mean 3.6.

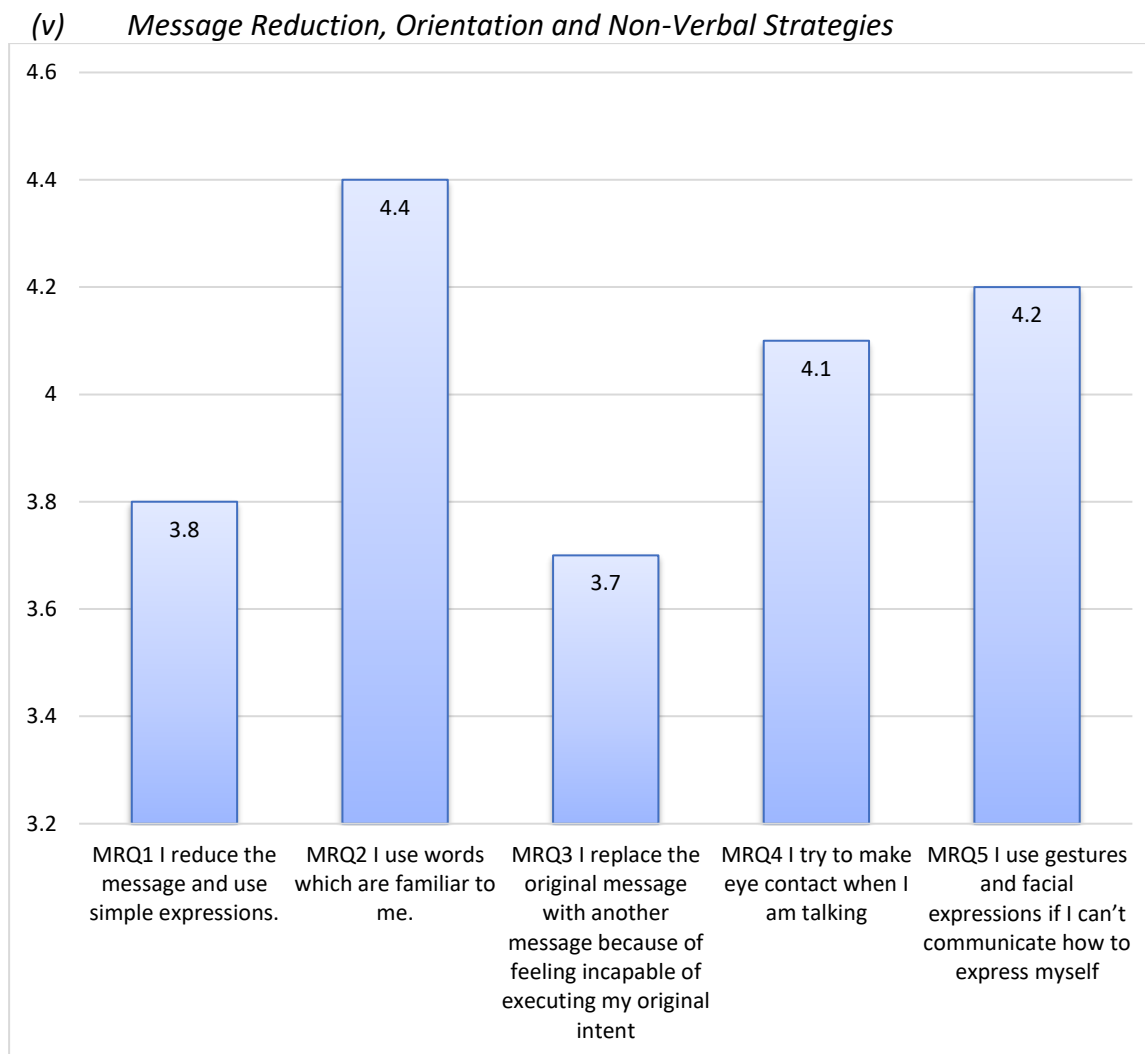(v)   *Message Reduction, Orientation and Non-Verbal Strategies*

Figure 11-Mean for Message Reduction, Orientation and Non-Verbal Strategies

Figure 11 shows the mean for message reduction, orientation, and non-verbal strategy. There are five items representing this variable. The item with the highest mean rate is "use words which are familiar to me", which is 4.4. This was followed by "use gesture and facial expression if I can't communicate how to express myself with a mean of 4.2'' and "try to make eye contact when I am talking" with a mean of 4.1. Two items obtained a mean of less than 4, namely "I reduce the message and use simple expression" and lastly "replace the original message with another message because of feeling incapable of executing my original intent", which respectively obtained mean scores of 3.8 and 3.7.

Findings for Fear of Oral Presentation
This section presents data to answer research question 2: How do external and internal causes influence fear of oral presentation? In the context of this study, there are two causes and they are (i) external factors and (ii) internal factors.
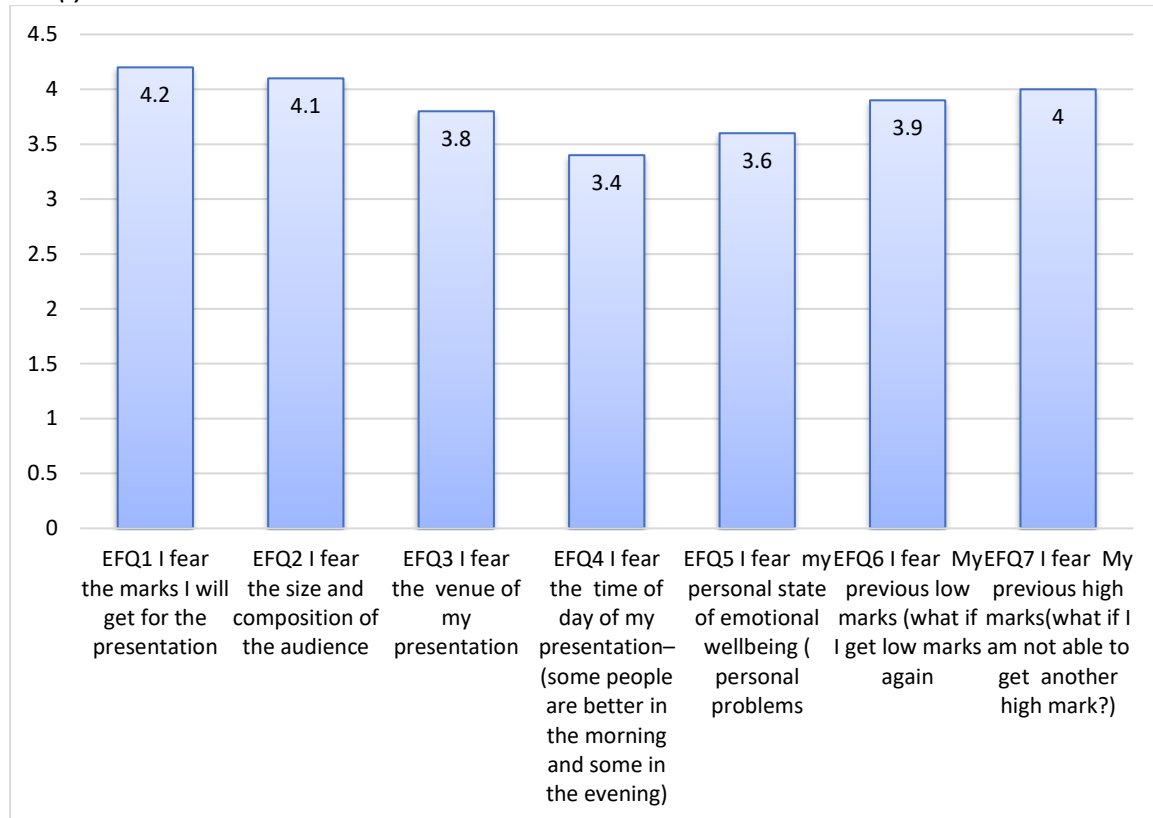
(i)   *External Factors*

Figure 12-Mean for External Factors

Figure 12 shows the highest mean for external factors were the fear of the marks for the presentation with 4.2 mean score, fear of the size and composition of the audience 4.1 mean score, fear of previous high marks with 4 mean score and 3.9 mean score for fear of previous low marks. Whilst, the lowest mean scores were reported 3.4 on items on the fear of the time of day of presentation- some people prefer morning or in the evening, followed by 3.6 mean score on item fear of state of own emotional wellbeing and 3.8 mean score for fear of the venue of the presentation.
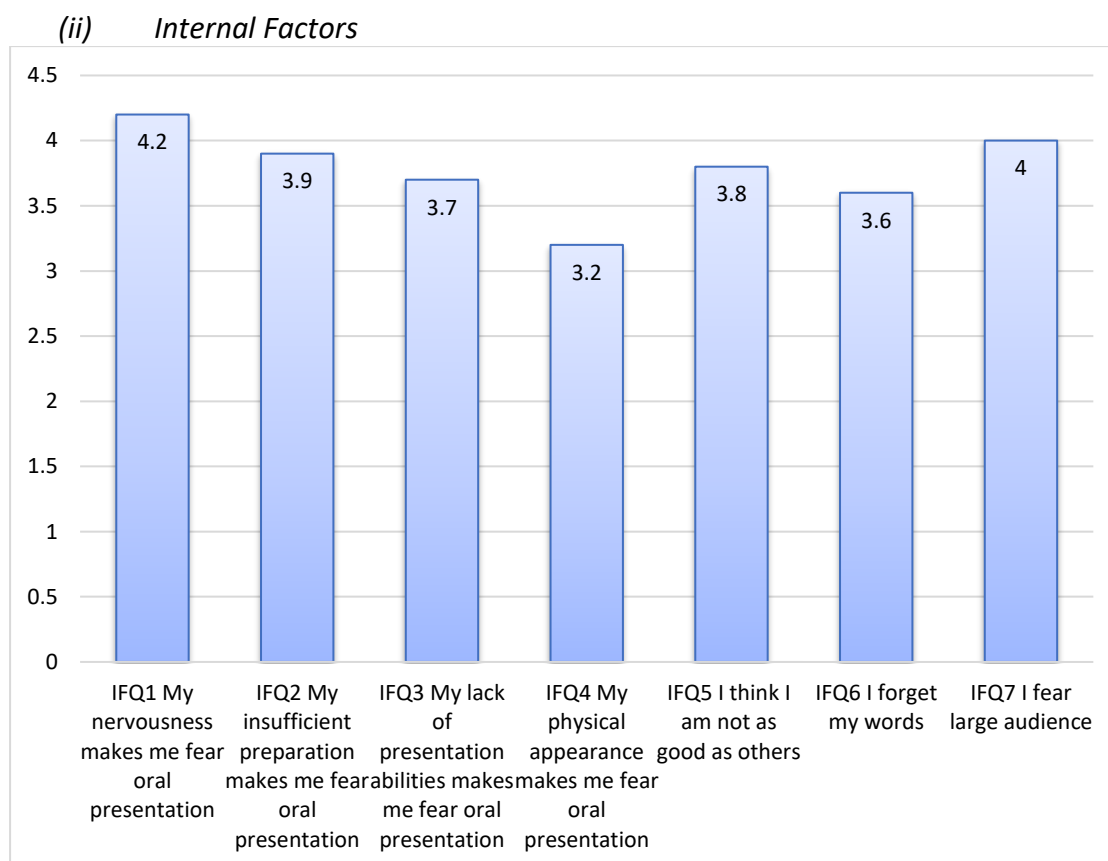
(ii) *Internal Factors*

Figure 13-Mean for Internal Factors

Figure 13 shows the highest mean for internal factors were the item "My nervousness makes me fear oral presentation" with 4.2 mean score, the item 'I fear large audience" 4 mean score, the item "My insufficient preparation makes me fear oral presentation" with 3.9 mean score and 3.8 mean score for item "I think I am not as good as others". Whilst, the lowest mean score was reported 3.2 on items on item "my physical appearance makes me fear oral presentation", followed by 3.6 mean score on item "I forget my words" and 3.7 mean score for "my lack of presentation abilities makes me fear oral presentation".

Conclusion
Summary of Findings and Discussion
Previous research has found that the five strategies discussed have met the criteria for reducing students' anxiety during oral presentations. Communication strategies expressed as social affective strategies, in which students are given the opportunity to ask questions, exchange opinions, and even collaborate with other friends to reduce anxiety. Meanwhile, fluency-oriented strategies, negotiation for meaning strategies, accuracy-oriented strategies, and finally message reduction, orientation, and nonverbal strategies discovered to help rebuild students' confidence in preparation for oral presentations, are linked to students' communication skills. This finding is similar to that of (Varma et al., 2022). While, as for a fear of oral presentation the findings have shown a similar trend with study done by Grieve et al (2021) and suggested a lack of and a need for additional comprehensive support for students who are afraid of public speaking or oral presentation.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestion for Future Research

Overall, this study has increased the evidence base with respect to further understanding the fear of oral presentations among universities students and adds to the growing evidence that anxiety factor had triggered the fear. A key conclusion from this study and in support of previous evidence is to expose the students to frequent public speaking practise to increase their confidence level in presenting their work done. Dynamic global society requires the new generation who are adaptable, innovative, and creative in problem solving and decision making, as well as those who can communicate effectively. In this rapidly changing world, the new generation must develop their individual potential in order to be prepared for the unique demands of the twenty-first century. The ability to communicate is necessary in order to function effectively in the real world. Employability skills in today's globalised world include, among other things, communication and presentation, planning, creative thinking, problem solving, critical thinking, and active and reflective application of knowledge. The ability to communicate is the most important goal of language learning. It is the ability to function effectively in the current world.

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