

Balancing The Use of Oral Communication Strategies and Fear for Oral Presentation: The Case for Language Learning

Jacinta Ann Xavier Belaman, Siti Fauziana binti Zakaria, Sharifah Nadia Syed Nasharudin, Irma Wahyuny Ibrahim, Sharifah Aflinda Syed Abdullah, Noor Hanim Rahmat

^{1,2,3,4}Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA. Shah Alam, Malaysia, ⁵Centre for the Advancement of Language Competence (CALC), Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Malaysia, ⁶Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Johor, Kampus Pasir Gudang

Email: jacinta@uitm.edu.my, sitifauziana@uitm.edu.my, sharifahnadia@uitm.edu.my, irma.wxy@gmail.com, aflinda@upm.edu.my, noorh763@uitm.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i6/13207>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i6/13207

Published Date: 06 June 2022

Abstract

Communication strategies play a vital role in helping students improve their English proficiency and their ability in oral presentation. However, there are students struggling to communicate in English due to their low ability. This is mainly because they lack the proper communication strategies. Thus, this study is conducted to find the communication strategies that are used in their oral presentation and factors that result in students' fear of oral presentations. This study employed a quantitative survey comprising three sections in order to get a more in-depth data analysis. A total of 210 students from a public university in Malaysia served as the respondents of this study. The results obtained show that the respondents use message reduction, orientation, and non-verbal strategies the most and they are influenced by several internal and external factors that cause fear in oral presentation. The use of oral communicative strategies has proven to be effective in assisting learners to overcome their fear in oral presentation.

Keywords: Communication Strategies, Oral Presentation, Fear, Communication Apprehension, English as Second Language (ESL)

Introduction

Background of Study

Communication and oral presentation skills are becoming more important in today's world. The importance of speaking is acknowledged in the daily life of students. Students must have the necessary skills to compete in the global economy and succeed in their professional careers. The skills needed to excel in English are becoming more prevalent globally. The 21st

century demands that graduates have the necessary skills to effectively communicate with others and acquire effective oral presentation skills. According to a study conducted in 2008 by Trevelyan & Tilli, 60% of graduates spend their time talking to people.

Some English as a second language (English L2) speakers are able to communicate effectively, while others find it difficult to achieve the same level of communication. As Candlin explained in 1983, many students encounter problems outside of the classroom when they encounter communication situations due to their lack of linguistic knowledge. Through communication strategies, students can overcome various communication obstacles and develop their communicative abilities (Canale & Swaine, 1980). Some of these include choosing the appropriate words and phrases to communicate their thoughts and ideas. They often face difficulties in communicating their thoughts in a different language due to their lack of communication skills. These strategies aim to help the speakers to reduce or remove their obstacles while communicating their thoughts and ideas to the others (Lam, 2006).

Statement of Problem

One of the earliest studies done on communication strategies was by Willems (1987) who wrote that in everyday true communication exchange, students are often faced with challenges such as finding the accurate word, understanding idiomatic expressions, and comprehending a topic, which subsequently result in communication breakdown. Willem argues that using communication strategies could help alleviate the problems as using communication strategies enable lower proficiency learners to “develop a feeling of being able to do something with the language” (p. 352) This notion is further corroborated by O’Malley and Chamot (1990) who stated that when there is communication between a native and non- native learner, communication strategies become especially important in negotiating meaning, as both learners do not share the same linguistic structures or sociolinguistic rules. Dong & Gai (2010) lend credence to this belief. According to their research, even learners who excel in their English class encounter challenges when they are asked to communicate with native speakers. Communication strategies are beneficial as it helps learners who are non-native speakers to compensate for the lack of proficiency, elaborate interaction and eventually enable learners to develop communicative competence in the target language (Dornyei, 1995).

Just like communication strategies, oral presentation is also an essential skill for language learners. Oral presentation is widely used especially in tertiary education as it allows students to practice the target language (NOUAIRIA, 2019). According to NOUAIRIA, conducting oral presentations allows students to practice using English regularly, enhances their self-confidence, and also helps them learn how to communicate. In addition, oral presentation can also help students to improve pronunciation, and learn how to present and defend their point of views (2019). Similarly, a study by Nguyen (2019) produced a similar finding. According to Nguyen, oral presentations help boost students’ self-confidence and teach them to speak correctly. Additionally, Nguyen’s study also found that students will enhance their vocabulary as well as develop soft skills via oral presentations (2019). However, there are some concerns faced by students with regards to oral presentations. According to Nguyen (2019), students often feel nervous about presenting and they are concerned about whether or not their pronunciation is correct. Correspondingly, NOUAIRIA (2019) stated that since it involves a language that is not fully mastered by the learners, students often encounter

anxiety and boredom when being asked to perform oral presentations. Hence the current study seeks to find the contributing factors that result in students' anxiety when doing oral presentations and the communication strategies that they use when conducting oral presentations.

Hence, this study is done to investigate the oral communications strategies and fear of oral presentation among language learners. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- How do learners use oral communication strategies in their oral presentation?
- What causes learners' fear of oral presentation?

Literature Review

Oral Communication Strategies

Oral presentation is one of the student's greatest fears. Ali et al (2021) claimed in their study that 63% of the respondents experienced the feeling of apprehension in giving an oral presentation. Meanwhile another study by Black (2019) found 75% of the population experienced speech anxiety. These problems need to be resolved to ensure learners' learning efficacy. Selinker (1972) pointed out that learners need communication strategies to survive oral presentation. He identified five processes: language transfer, strategies of second language communication, transfer of training, strategies of second language learning, and over-generalisation are the processes which were related with language learners' mistakes during L2 oral presentation. He also claimed that the communication strategies occurred during oral presentations to help learners cope with the difficult situation.

It is also proven that oral communication skills and oral communication strategies are interrelated. Bialystok and Frohlich (1980) stated that communication strategies are the mediums to show relations between linguistic ability and communicative ability, in other words, communication strategies show what the learners are able to do as opposed to the knowledge and the skills that the learners have.

Fear of Oral Presentation

According to Rahmat (2019) fear in oral presentation is caused by trait and state apprehension. Figure 1 presents the fear in oral presentation that is caused by apprehension. If the fear comes from trait apprehension, then this fear mainly comes from the person's personal characteristics. Some people become very nervous when it comes to oral presentation. Some people have low self-esteem when it comes to oral presentation. Next, state apprehension is caused by the surrounding environment of the presenter. The presenter may fear the audience, the set up of the room or even negative evaluation by others

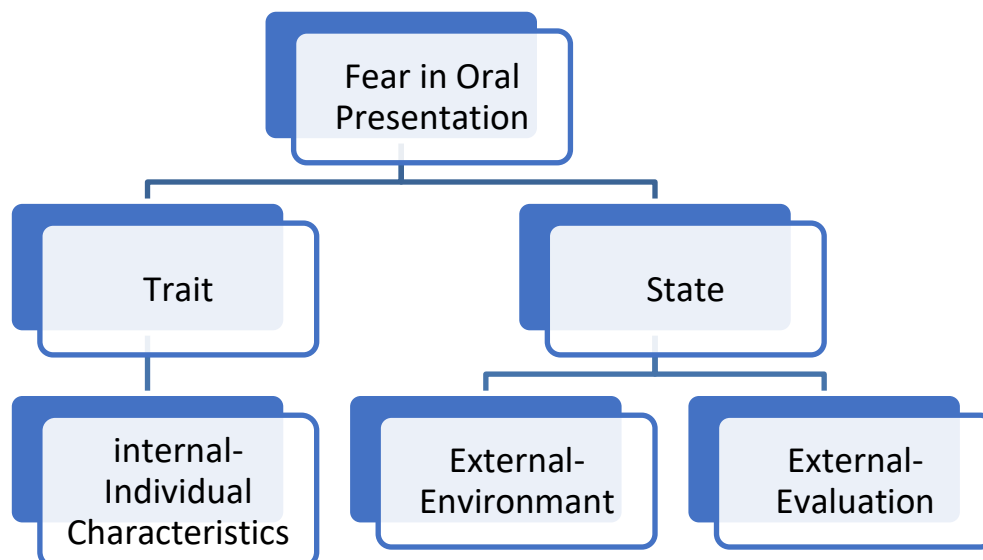


Figure 1- Rahmat (2019)

In addition to trait and state apprehension, learners often fear oral presentation because they are worried that their vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation are not accurate when presenting in English (Kurakan, 2021). From the interview conducted in his study, it was gathered that the respondents expressed their concerns that the accent they have when speaking English causes apprehension in them when conducting oral presentations. Parallel to Kurakan's study, a study by Kakandee and Al-Shaibani (2018) also identified fear of incorrect pronunciation as one of the causes that contributes to their fear of oral presentation. Kakandee and Al-Shaibani's (2018) study which was conducted on tourism students in Thailand also highlighted that the respondents also acknowledged that lack of preparation and training as one of the reasons why they fear oral presentations.

Another study that is worth noting was conducted by Chandran, Munohsamy & Rahman, (2015). In their study involving 63 first year students of Institut Teknologi Brunei (ITB), it was found that the highest proportion of respondents (23%) noted lack of preparation as the reason why they fear oral presentation. The same percentage of respondents also identified fear of making mistakes as one of the reasons. Other reasons acknowledged by the respondents are lack of confidence (15%), fear of audience (15%), insufficient knowledge (10%), mental block (8%) and lack of confidence in language skill (7%) (Chandran et al, 2015)

Past Studies

Past Studies on Oral Communication Strategies

Communicative strategies are important aspects needed by foreign language learners to help them communicate effectively. Many studies have been done to investigate the use of oral communication strategies in foreign language learning. A study done by Ahmed, Sabri (2018) found that there are different types of strategies used by learners, depending on their level of language proficiency. Using classroom observation methods, the study was done with 120 second and third year EFL students from the Rafdan College of Education, India. The findings of the study revealed that students with high linguistic ability tend to use effective strategies such as paraphrasing for meaning, asking speaker for help as well as non-verbal signals while students with low linguistic ability employed strategies such as avoiding the topic, abandon their messages, switching into their mother-tongue or even stop talking whenever they face

any barrier in communicating. It was also discovered in the study that the main reason for students not utilizing the communication strategies effectively is because they lacked exposure and training in using such strategies. In another study done by Rohani (2021), it is found that there were varied uses of oral communication strategies with social affective strategies favored by most students especially those with high proficiency level. With mixed method design employed as the methodology of the study, 110 students of the Business Administration Department of the State Polytechnic of Malang, Indonesia who participated were given questionnaires and interview questions. In conclusion, it was agreed that students with higher proficiency used more strategies compared to those students with low level of language proficiency. Therefore, the findings of this study can be useful for teachers in creating more opportunities for students to better utilize the communication strategy, thus having better development in foreign language learning.

Past Studies on Fear of Oral Presentation

Having the confidence to speak in front of an audience is believed to be quite challenging for learners, especially when English is not their first language. There have been many past studies on the fear and anxiety of oral presentation among university students. According to research done by Grieve et.al (2021), there were 46 undergraduate and postgraduate students from the University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol purposely chosen for the study. The researcher employed questionnaires in obtaining the data and based on the result, it was discovered that there were six themes of anxiety faced by students namely: fear of being judged, physical symptoms, uncertainty about the topic, negative consequences on university experience, practice and preparation, and more practical support required. The students also agreed that the fears have a negative effect on their whole language learning experience. The implication of the study is teachers could acknowledge students' fear and provide more support for students to overcome their fear in oral presentation.

As the fear and anxiety exhibited in oral presentations among university students cannot be taken lightly, it is important to investigate the factors contributing to it. Arumugam et. al (2021) investigated anxiety during oral presentations in English Among Malaysian Undergraduates. Using a quantitative method, questionnaires were distributed to 300 undergraduates from three public universities in Malaysia namely UiTM, UKM and UMT. The questionnaire was intended to find out the factors contributing to the fear as well as strategies used by learners to cope with them. The findings further revealed that the factors of oral presentation can be divided into three categories which are Language Ability, Audience Reactions, and Teacher Feedback. It is also agreed that acknowledging learners' fear can help them to improve and overcome their anxiety in foreign language learning. These findings can become references for teachers and educational institutions to help understand about speaking anxiety among language learners in tertiary education.

Conceptual Framework

It is not uncommon for presenters to fear their oral presentation. However, the use of oral communication strategies can help learners overcome their fear for oral presentation. This study (refer to figure 1) is rooted from Endler (1980) for oral communication strategies and Yaman, & Kavasoglu, (2013) for fear of oral presentation.



Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study-Balancing The Use of Oral Communication Strategies and Fear for Oral Presentation.

Methodology

This quantitative research is done to investigate how learners use cognitive and meta cognitive strategies when they learn French as a foreign language. The instrument used is a survey adapted from Endler (1980) for oral communication strategies and Yaman & Kavasoglu (2013) for fear of oral presentation. 210 respondents were purposively chosen to answer the survey.

The survey has 3 main sections and uses 5 likert scale (.1-never, 2-Rarely, 3-Sometimes, 4-Very often, and 5-Always). With reference to Table 1, section A has items on the demographic profile. Section B has 26 items on Oral Communications Strategies (OCS) and section C has 14 items on fear of oral Presentation (FOP).

Table 1
Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	CONSTRUCTS	ITEMS	
B	ORAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES (OCS)	Social Affective	6
		Fluency Oriented	6
		Accuracy Oriented	5
		Negotiation for Meaning	4
		Message Reduction, Orientation, and Non-Verbal	5
		Total number of Items for OCS	26
C	FEAR OF ORAL PRESENTATION (FOP)	External Factors	7
		Internal Factors	7
		Total number of items for FOP	14
		Total number of Items in Survey	40

Table 2-Reliability Statistics of the Instrument

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.911	40

Table 2 presents the reliability statistics for the instrument. SPSS analysis revealed a Cronbach alpha of .911 thus showing a high internal reliability of the instrument used. Data is collected online via google form. Data is then analysed using SPSS version 26. Analysed data is presented in the form of percentages and mean scores to answer the 2 research questions.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

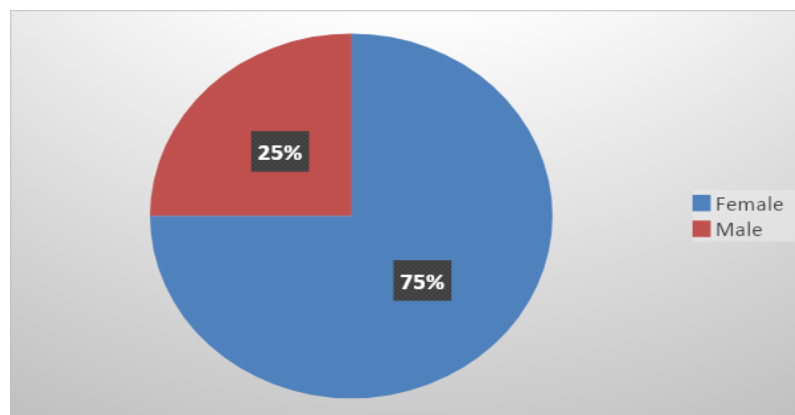


Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

Figure 2 presents the percentage for gender of the respondents. 75% or the majority of the respondents were female. Only 25% of the respondents were male. This made a male to female ratio of 1: 3.

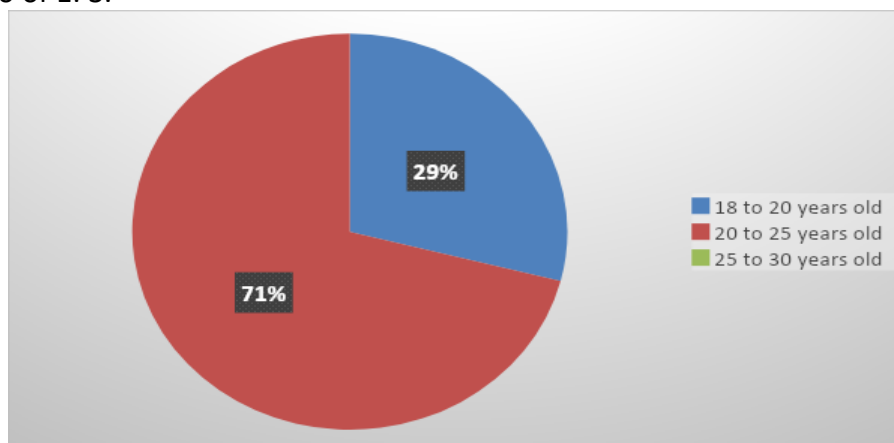


Figure 3- Percentage for Age Group

Figure 3 presents the age group of respondents. Most of the respondents are 20 to 25 years of age (71%), followed by 29% of the respondents are 18 to 20 years old.

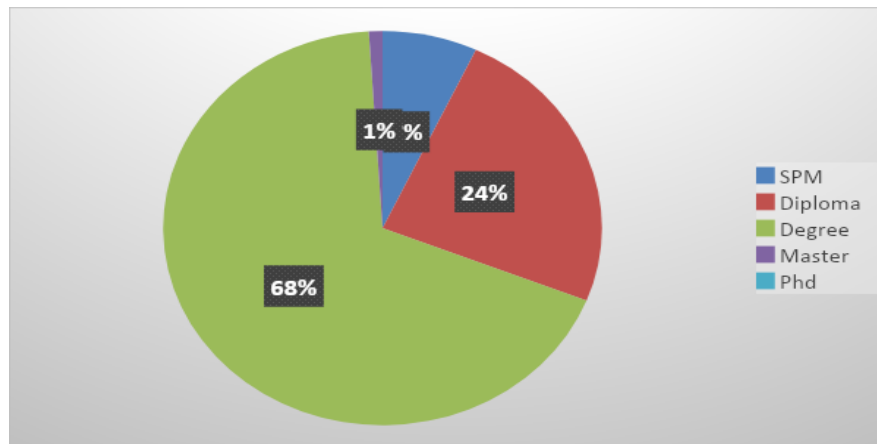


Figure 4- Percentage for Highest Academic Level

Question 3 in this section seeks to find respondents' highest academic level. The highest number of respondents are Degree holders with 68%, 24% of the respondents are Diploma holders, followed by 7% SPM holders and 1% of the respondents are Masters holders.

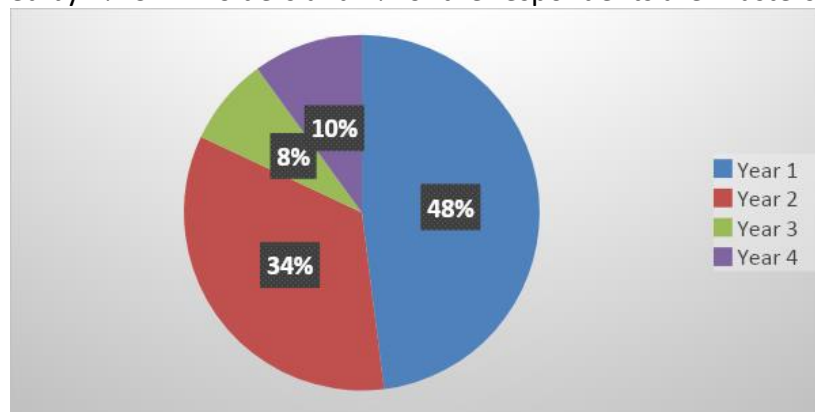


Figure 5- Percentage for Year of Study

Figure 5 presents the respondents' years of studies in the university. 48 % of the majority of the respondents were first year students. 34% of the respondents were second year students. 10 % of the respondents were fourth year students and finally, only 8% of the respondents were third year students.

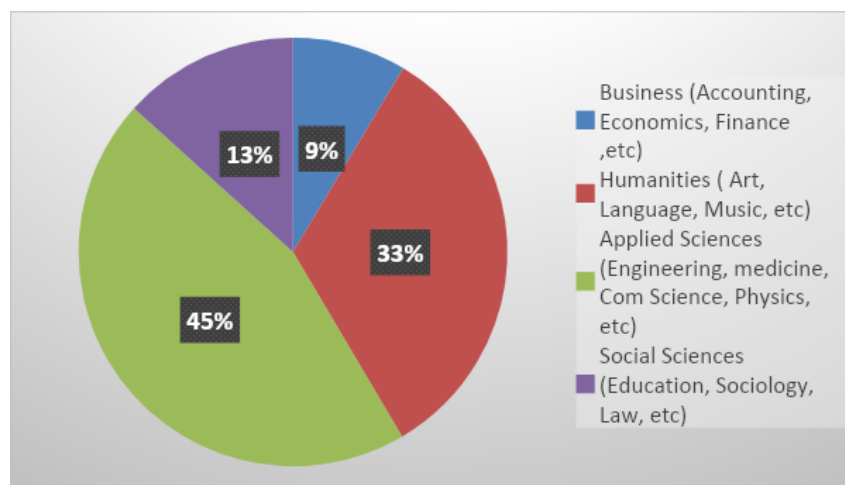


Figure 6- Percentage for Field of Study

The distribution of respondents based on their field of study is shown in Figure 6. Most of the respondents were from Applied Sciences (45.2%). Meanwhile, 32.9% of the respondents were from the Humanities. This is followed by Social Sciences (13.3%) and finally, only 8.6% of the total respondents were from the Business field of study.

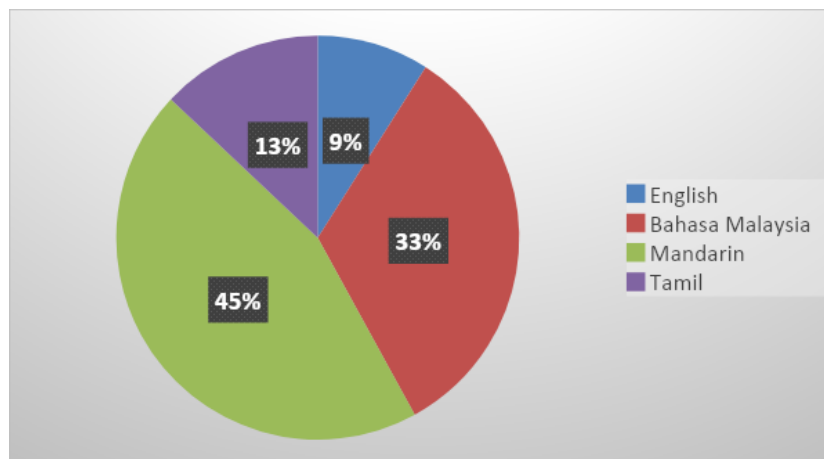


Figure 7- Percentage for Fluency

Figure 7 presents the language fluency of the respondents. 45% of the respondents indicated that they are fluent in Mandarin. 33% of the respondents are fluent in Bahasa Malaysia. Meanwhile, 13% of the respondents can speak in Tamil fluently, and only 9% of the respondents can speak fluently in the English Language. This shows that the most fluent language spoken by the respondents is Mandarin, and the least is English Language.

Findings for Oral Communication Strategies

This section presents data to answer research question 1: How do learners use oral communication strategies in their oral presentation? According to Endler (1980), there are several types of communications strategies and they are (a) social affective strategies, (b) fluency oriented, (c) accuracy oriented, (d) negotiation for meaning, and (e) message reduction, orientation, and non-verbal strategies.

(a) social affective strategies

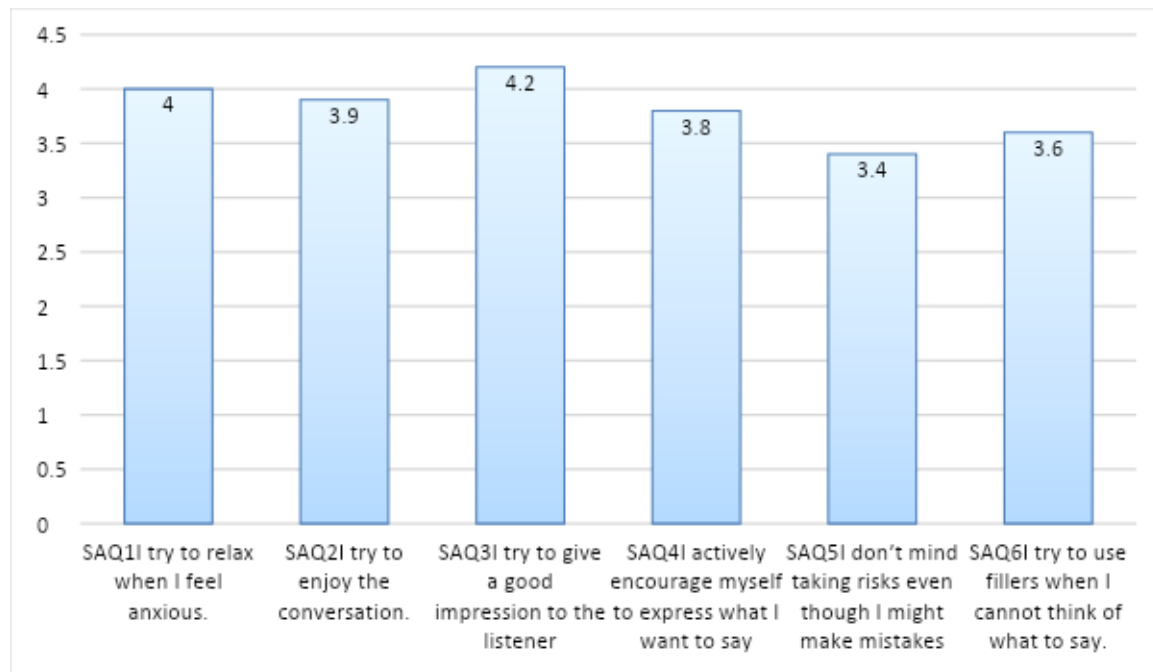


Figure 8 – Mean for Social-Affective Strategies

Figure 8 shows the mean score for Social-Affective Strategies. Based on the items, the highest mean score is for item SAQ3 where students try to give a good impression to the listener at 4.2, followed by item SAQ1 at a mean score of 4. The third and fourth highest mean score obtained is 3.9 and 3.8 respectively for the item SAQ2 and SAQ4. At a mean score of 3.6, respondents tried to use fillers when they can't think of what to say. The lowest mean score of 3.4 shows that the respondents don't mind taking risks even though they might make mistakes.

(b) fluency oriented

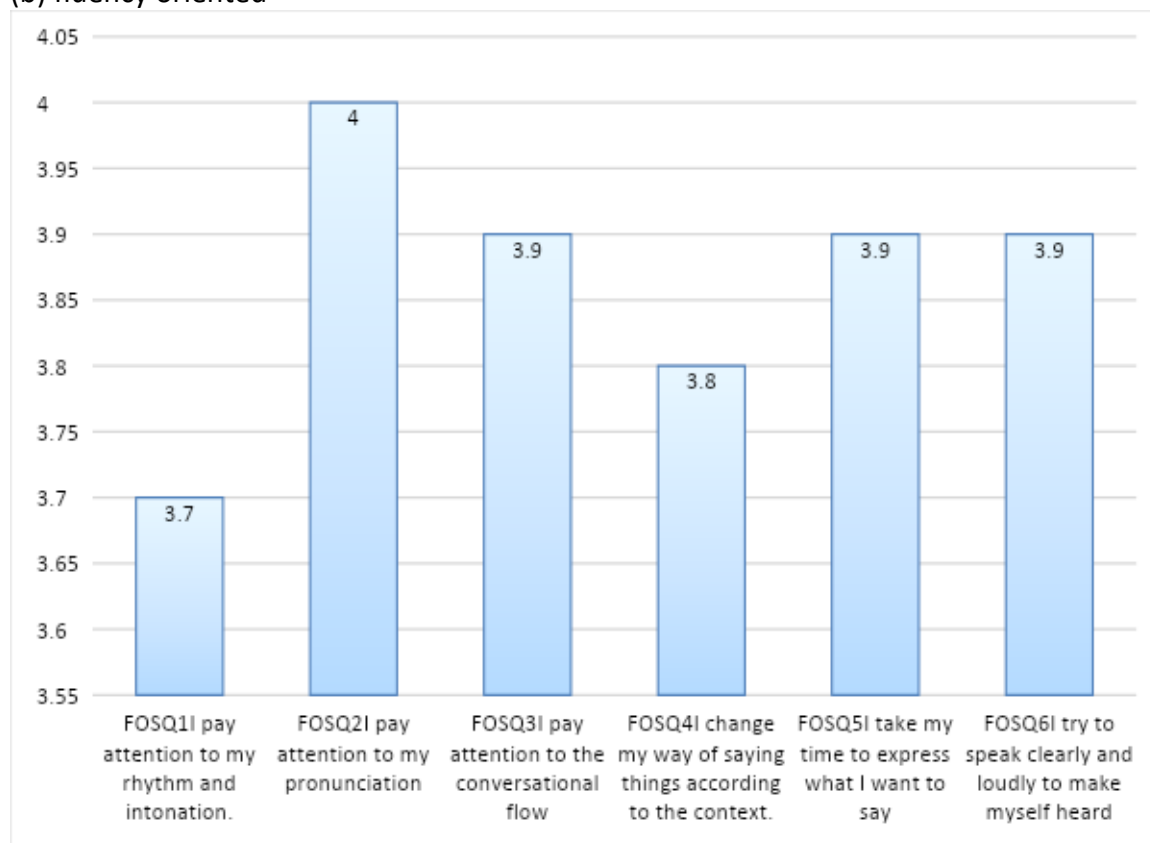


Figure 9 – Mean for Fluency Oriented Strategies

Figure 9 depicts respondent's answers to statements related to Fluency Oriented Strategies. For the first statement "I pay attention to my rhythm and intonation" the mean score obtained is 3.7, while mean score 4 is obtained for the statement "I pay attention to my pronunciation". The next statements "I pay attention to the conversational flow", "I take my time to express what I want to say", and "I try to speak clearly and loudly to make myself heard" all obtained mean score of 3.9 respectively. Finally, for the statement "I change my way of saying things according to the context", the mean score obtained is 3.8.

(c) accuracy oriented

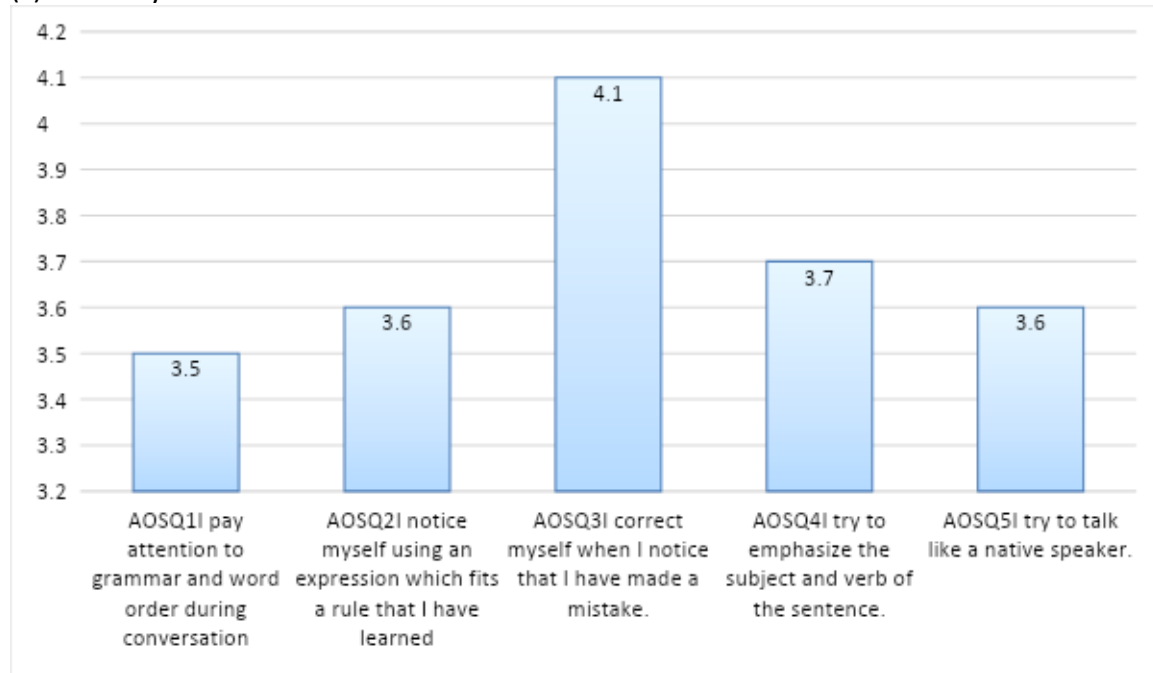


Figure 10- Mean for Accuracy Oriented Strategies

Figure 10 illustrates the mean score for “Accuracy Oriented Strategies”. The highest mean score with 4.1 is the respondent corrects himself/herself when he/she notices that he/she has made a mistake. The second highest mean score with 3.7 is the respondent tries to emphasize the subject and verb of the sentence. The third and fourth mean score with 3.6 reflects that the respondent tries to talk like a native speaker and the respondents notices himself/herself using an expression which fits a rule that he/she has learned. The last mean score of 3.5 implies the respondent pays attention to grammar and word order during conversation.

(d) negotiation for meaning

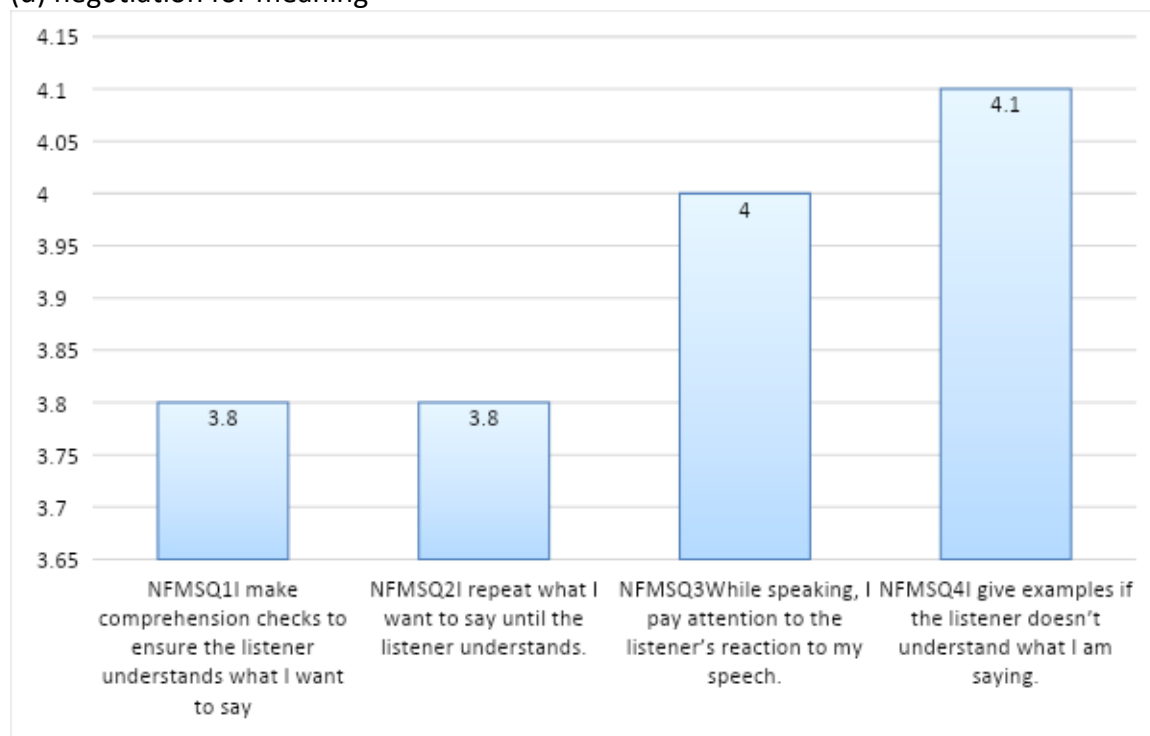


Figure 11- Mean for Negotiation for Meaning Strategies

As displayed in Figure 11, in terms of negotiation for meaning strategies, item NFMSQ4I has the highest mean score (4.1) which indicated that one of the strategies used is learners give examples if the listener doesn't understand what they are saying. The second highest mean score is 4.0 which shows that learners pay attention to the listener's reaction to their speech while speaking. Finally, item NFMSQ1I '*make comprehension checks to ensure the listener understands what I want to say*' and item NFMSQ2I '*I repeat what I want to say until the listener understands*' have the lowest mean score which is 3.8.

(e) message reduction, orientation, and non-verbal strategies

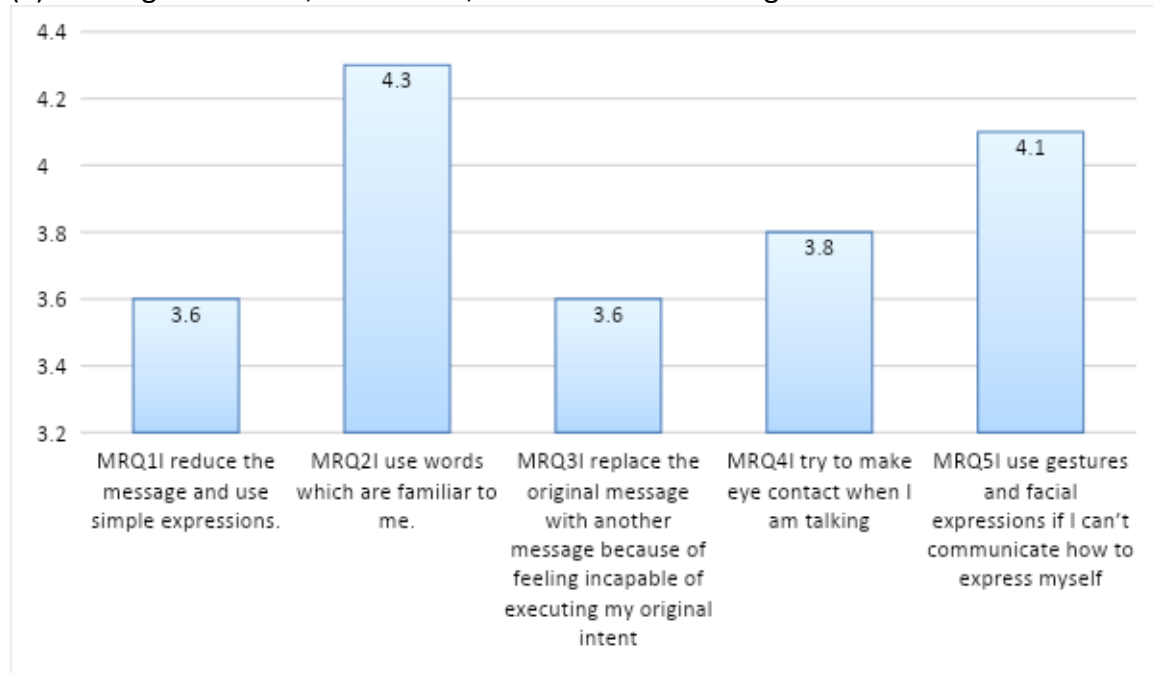


Figure 12- Mean for Message Reduction, Orientation and Non-Verbal Strategies

Figure 12 illustrates the mean score for “Message Reduction, Orientation and Non-Verbal Strategies”. The highest mean score with 4.3 is the respondent uses words which are familiar to him or her. The second highest mean score with 4.1 is the respondent uses gestures and facial expressions when he or she cannot communicate how to express himself or herself. The third mean score shows that the respondent tries to make eye contact when he or she is talking. The last mean score of 3.6 is shared by the respondent who reduces the message and uses simple expressions, and the respondent who replaces the original message with another message because of feeling incapable of executing his or her original intent.

Findings for Fear of Oral Presentation

This section presents data to answer research question 2: What causes learners' fear of oral presentation? Yaman, & Kavasoglu, (2013) reported that there are two causes of fear of oral presentation among learners and they are (a) external factors and (b) internal factors.

(a) external factors

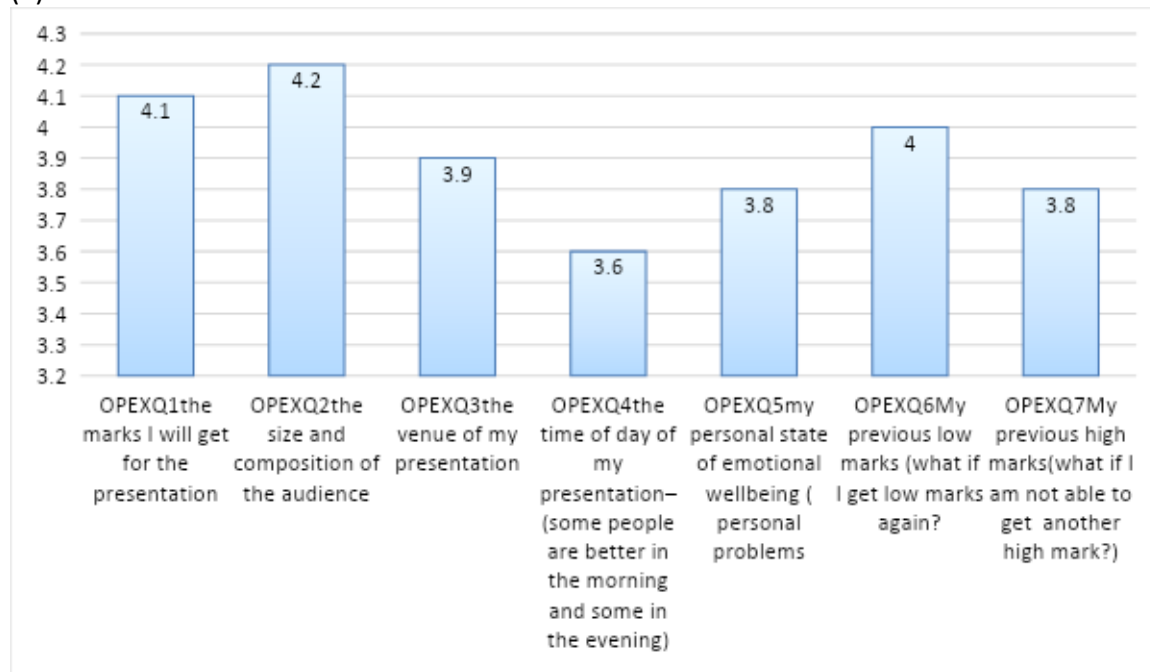


Figure 13- Mean for External Factors

Figure 13 depicts students' responses towards statements pertaining to external factors that contribute to fear of oral presentations among students. The highest mean (4.2) was obtained for the size and composition of the venue, followed by the marks for the presentation and previous low marks with mean scores of 4.1 and 4 respectively. The next external factor that contributes to fear of oral presentation is the venue of the presentation with 3.9 mean score while the least mean score of 3.8 respectively was obtained for students' personal state of being and previous high marks.

(b) Internal Factors

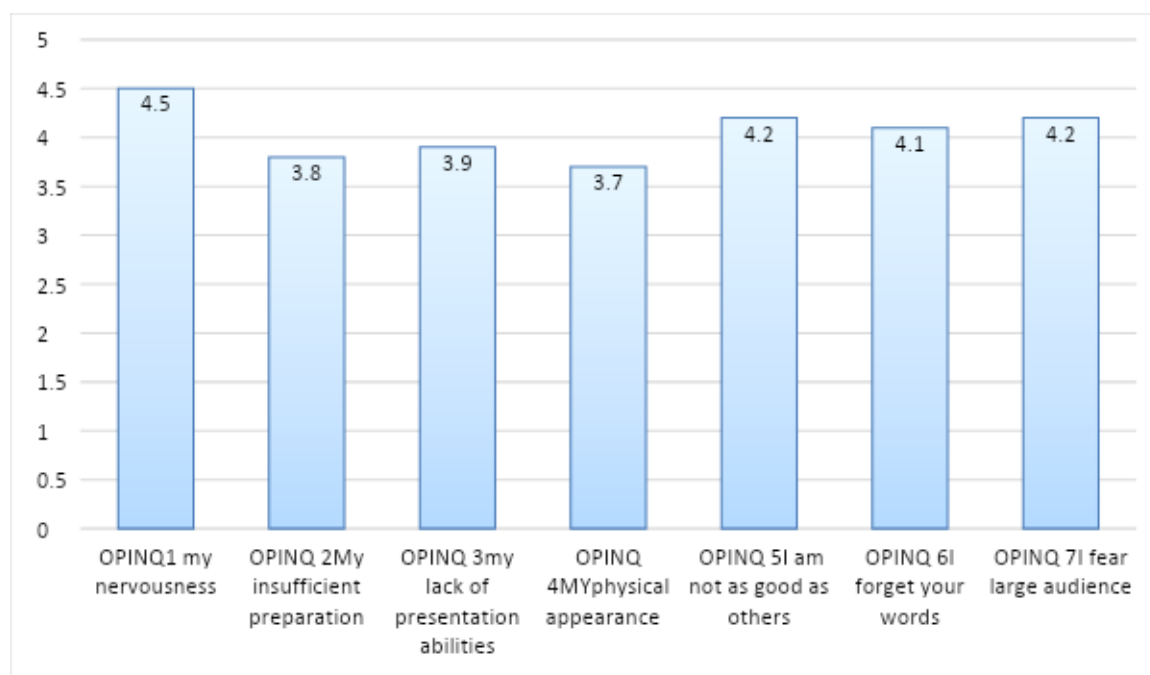


Figure 14- Mean for Internal Factors

Figure 14 displays the mean score for “Internal Factors that Causes Fear of Oral Presentations”. The highest mean score with 4.5 indicates the respondent’s nervousness. The second and also third mean score with 4.2 implies the respondent believes that he/she is not as good as others and he/she fears a large audience. The fourth mean score with 4.1 reflects that the respondent claims he/she forgets his/her words. The fifth mean score with 3.9 shows the respondent claims his/her lack of presentation abilities causes his/her fear of Oral Presentation. The sixth mean score with 3.8 implies the respondent believes that he/she has insufficient preparation. The final mean score of 3.7 suggests the respondent believes that his /her physical appearance is one of the internal factors that causes fear of oral presentation.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussion

Communication Strategies

In this study, respondents employed message reduction, orientation and non-verbal strategies the most and Socio-Affective the least. It can be seen that the strategy “I use words which are familiar to me” obtained the highest mean score. In the present study and previous studies by Chen (2009); Kavasoglu (2011), it is found that this strategy is mostly used by lower proficiency learners. A past study by Nakatani (2006) reveals that participants used familiar expressions to avoid communication breakdown. They also indicated that they would use well-known words to communicate, as opposed to giving up when they encounter difficulty in conveying meaning.

The strategy “I don’t mind taking risks even though I might make mistakes” stated the lowest mean score. Respondents tend to feel embarrassed when they make grammatical errors or pronounce words incorrectly, thus they avoid taking risks when speaking in English.

Additionally, they preferred to use well-known expressions and words when communicating with others. Liu and Jackson (2008) stated that it is important for students to develop a willingness to make risky decisions in order to successfully learn a second language. In addition, Luft (2007) identifies four characteristics and behaviours related to risk-taking: (1) being willing to appear foolish in order to communicate and get the message across; (2) using the language when not required to do so; (3) being comfortable with uncertainty and willing to try out guesses; and (4) being willing to make mistake in order to learn and communicate.

Oral Presentation

The study focused on the internal and external factors that contribute to the fear of oral presentation. It also found that respondents have the fear of speaking in front of a huge audience. The size and the composition of the audience were the most common factors that contributed to the fear of oral presentation, while personal state of emotional wellbeing, and worry about not being able to do better than the prior performance, recorded as the lowest external factors. A study conducted in 2020 by Rajitha and Alamelu suggested that the main factor that contributed to the anxiety of students was their peers and audiences. A study conducted by Ibrahim et al (2021), also stated that the fear of being in front of a large crowd was the main fear faced by undergraduates in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Young (1990, as cited in Horwits, 2001, p.119) found that American secondary language students preferred and are more confident participating in oral presentations in small groups rather than in front of a huge crowd.

Next, internal factors also evoke fear in oral presentation. It is evident from this study that respondents' nervousness recorded the highest mean score and physical appearance was the least important factor for fear in oral presentation. Students who are nervous tend to have a hard time coming up with ideas for their oral presentations. They also stated that their peers make fun of them and make them nervous before presenting. Therefore, students feel stressed and nervous during presentations (Lucas, 2001; Kakepoto et al., 2012).

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestion for Future Research

In conclusion, the use of oral communicative strategies has proven to be effective in assisting FL learners to overcome their fear in oral presentation. The strategies namely (a) social affective strategies, (b) fluency oriented, (c) accuracy oriented, (d) negotiation for meaning, and (e) message reduction, orientation, and non-verbal strategies can be used to ensure a meaningful communication in language learning. As stated by Siti Rohani (2021), employing such strategies can help in supporting students to have better development of their skills. Thus, it is suggested that teachers acknowledge fear of oral presentation among learners and provide more support for them to employ the oral communication strategies in foreign language learning. Suggested further research include: i) Virtual presentation can overcome fear of oral presentation among students. ii) It is not apparent in this study which factors between external factors or internal factors that give the most impact to fear of oral presentation.

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