

# Innovations

## Enhancing Oral Presentation Skills: A Study on Improving Students' Speaking Abilities in the Academic Environment

**Eba Teresa Garoma**

College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Jimma University, Jimma, Ethiopia

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**Abstract :** *Oral presentation skill is an asset for all students, particularly, for graduating classes as they are ready for real world interaction. A graduate with good oral presentation skills has a better chance in career advancement and promotion rather than the one who does not. It is, thus, vital for university students to have exposure to oral communication strategies. The main purpose of this study was to enhance graduating undergraduate students' oral presentation skills. The study involved a comprehensive training program for undergraduate students (Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Arts) in Jimma University. Data collection methods included observation checklists, interviews and post-training assessments. The findings revealed key areas for improvement in delivery, content organization and non-verbal communication skills. Challenges identified encompassed issues like inadequate eye contact, unclear speech, and ineffective use of visual aids. The interventions targeted psychological and technical aspects of students' presentation challenges. Training sessions were conducted to address these issues, with positive outcomes noted in terms of increased self-confidence and improved presentation preparation skills. Recommendations included the need for continued training, practice in English language proficiency, and teacher support to cultivate effective presentation skills among students.*

**Keywords:** *Content organization, delivery skills, non-verbal communication, oral presentation, psychological factors, speaking skill*

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### 1. Introduction

The current language learning and teaching trends demand students to acquire the skills necessary to speak and interact with confidence and comprehension in the classroom activities and in the professional realm outside of the classroom. Allwright (1984, p. 158) claims the importance of classroom oral interaction in language

learning, in foreign language lessons as “inherent in the very notion of classroom pedagogy itself”. Engaging students to delivering oral presentation is one crucial activity in the process of learners’ English language development in order to help them cope with the academic demands of their future career. Oral presentation enhances students’ oral communication skills for accomplishing various oral activities confidently and for developing their oral ability to express their thoughts (ideas, feelings, opinions and facts) in English competently with reasonable accuracy and fluency (Richards and Rodgers, 2014).

Oral presentation is one of the most essential skills students need to possess in its maximal stage. Oral presentation could be many types, but the focus of this study is on oral presentations whereby students prepare and give short talks in their classroom. Becoming a competent and successful oral presenter involves learning to manage various skills: these skills could be managing the inevitable anxiety that comes with oral presentations, well-preparedness, confidence while speaking on their own in front of a large group, or to take personal responsibility for critically understanding and responding to questions (Shumin, 2010). Accordingly, students are required to attain sufficient knowledge, skills and proficiency sought when they come to oral presentations. The focus of this study is, therefore, to enhance graduating undergraduate students’ oral presentation by helping students to acquire qualities of successful presentation skills.

In language learning and teaching, a large proportion of time is spent in engaging students to actively participate in classroom interactions because the quality of observable interactive patterns of student participation in classroom discourse correlates with learning outcomes. As a basic medium of classroom interaction, oral presentation plays a crucial part in the process of learners’ language development. However, most of the time, language teachers complain students’ failing to conduct a successful oral presentation because of certain factors. Therefore, they explain students’ failure of delivering successful oral presentation as a major issue that deserves a priority remedy in order to help them succeed and be competent in their language study endeavor (Richards and Rodgers, 2014; Wallwork, 2010). Successful oral presentation involves implementing various integrated skills. Among these skills, the main ones are delivery skills, non-verbal communication skills, and content organization Skills.

The main objective of this study is to enhance oral presentation skills of graduating undergraduate students of Jimma University in 2022/23 academic year. The specific objectives of this study are:

- Identifying problems of students' presentation in terms of delivery, non-verbal communication and content organization skills;
- Intervening the problems of oral presentations of the students through short term training;
- Assessing the effects of the interventions to tackle the presentation problems of the students.

This study has contributions in the future career of the students. It creates platforms where non-verbal cues are combined with effective verbal skills adding a broader aspect to students' communication. It also allows the students to present their thoughts and views confidently in-front of a live audience. Although the intervention task requires lots of efforts, ideas and enthusiasm, it helps them in proper planning, preparation, and practice so that they really deliver an effective oral presentation.

The study is confined in its scope. The target groups are 2022/23 graduating undergraduate students of College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Jimma University. Conceptually, it focuses on oral presentation skills of students, mainly on delivery, non-verbal communication and content organization skills. Hence, linguistic or verbal issues are out of the scope of the study.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Speaking skills of students in Ethiopia**

Interest in the English language, as a means of international communication, has grown substantially. It has already become the language of professional communication in various spheres of life. Most students wish to learn speaking English; that is why speaking plays a primary role in teaching oral communication. Speaking is considered to be one of the four macro-skills. It essential for effective communication in any language, particularly when speakers are not using their mother tongue (Harmer, 1987). As English is universally used as a means of communication, especially on the Internet, speaking skills should be developed along with the other skills so that these integrated skills will enhance communication competence (Richards and Rodgers, 2014).

In Ethiopia, like in many other countries, the problem of speaking skills is crucial. A number of researchers investigated this field and came to the conclusion about students' low level of speaking ability and their inability to speak confidently and fluently. Among the many reasons to take into consideration might be lack of confidence and anxiety about making errors. Most university students are not

confident in their ability to learn speaking. Teachers must overcome their reluctance in order to change this situation (Berhanu, 2009; Dereje, 2012).

Zaremba (2006) and Zhang (2009) hypothesize that, of the four macro-skills, speaking seems to be the most important skill required for communication. Students who study English as a foreign language usually have limited opportunities to speak English outside the classroom and also limited exposure to English speakers or members of the international community. This might be one reason for teachers to provide more situations and activities for students to strengthen their speaking competence.

In addition, there are a number of factors relating to speaking skills to be considered for effective communication. Pronunciation, vocabulary, and collocations are singled out as important factors to be emphasized in building fluency for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speakers. Providing students with a variety of situations and frequent speaking tasks plays a significant role in the improvement of their fluency when speaking (Boonkit, 2010). Confidence and competence usually reinforce speaking skills. Patil (2008) asserted that building up the learner's confidence to eliminate their fear of making errors was a priority that a teacher should consider in order to make learners feel comfortable with their language use. These could be developed from appropriate syllabus design, methods of teaching, and adequate tasks and materials (Bailey, 2005; Songsiri, 2007).

Regarding effectiveness in communication, Shumin (2010) pointed out a number of elements involved, including listening skills, socio-cultural factors, affective factors, and other linguistic and sociolinguistic competences, such as grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic aspects. Grammatical competence enables speakers to use and understand language structures accurately and unhesitatingly, which contributes to their fluency, and in turn, develops confidence in communication.

In general, the problems of Ethiopia students regarding their communication skills can be divided into four main groups (Berhanu, 2009, p. 1098; Dereje, 2012, pp. 277-79). (1) Students feel shy speaking English because they are afraid of making mistakes. It is usually seen at the initial level as they are afraid of being criticized by teachers and other students. (2) Working in pairs (or groups), students often begin to use their native language. (3) Students don't have enough information on the topics discussed even in their native language. (4) Students feel a lack of linguistic and verbal resources for solving the given task. In that case, the teacher should create a friendly atmosphere of collaboration so that students will not be afraid of admitting their mistakes and will accept criticism.

## 2.2. Improving students' oral presentation skills

Speaking of self-esteem in the academic environment, a number of studies have found out that a significant area of students' confidence is composed of their ability to express their ideas well in a language used as a medium of instruction. Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009), for instance, found that students' ability to learn a language had to do a lot with fear of negative evaluation from their peers and perception of low ability in relation to their peers. Keely (2014) also argued that learners succinctly monitor their own performance and the reaction of the interlocutor(s) and may abandon their communication in fear of making a mistake or other form of lost self-confidence.

Studies conducted in Ethiopia cohere with the above arguments. Abebe and Narayana (2016, p. 663), for instance, studied learners' speaking problems in Hadiya Zone (Ethiopia) and concluded that "learners worry about their correctness and accuracy when they expressed their ideas, feelings". Another study by Dawit and Demis (2015) also concluded that students' participation in EFL classrooms was highly affected by such factors as fear of being embarrassed by teachers, lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem and anxiety about being inferior to other students in terms of speaking skills, etc.

The above studies emphasize the importance of learners' self-esteem and self-confidence to motivate language learning, apart from emphasis on subject matter teaching. Since language learning is by and large learning to communicate, it should well be analyzed, criticized and intervened, not only in terms of learning the language itself, but also on behavioral aspects, such as self expression, willingness to actively interact, acceptance of errors as part of learning, etc. The approaches commonly suggested by these scholars range from case-based follow ups on learners to more policy/strategy-focused paths for an improved language learning trend. Two of them are elaborated as follow.

**Administrative measures:** Abebe and Narayana (2016) argue for the need for institution administrators to closely support language teaching programs so as to adjust curriculum, resource mobilization for all types of students and programs. Some of the studies in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) also highlight problems of language learning to come from such administrative issues as the amount of time allowed for courses (Dawit and Demis, 2015), "lack of variety in activities within the curriculum ... and imbalance between academic and communicative language teaching within the policy" (Banti, 2003, p. 101), etc. Therefore, it is convincing to consider HEI administrators and policy makers as

major stake holders in the effort to improve students' learning, particularly on oral presentation skills.

Tuan and Mai (2015) suggested that schools work on revising language teaching curriculum to include more speaking activities in the lessons. Kochito (2013) also suggested that institutions set up consistent training opportunities for language instructors in their strategies. The need for regular training for teachers was more stiffly argued by Girma (2014, p. 218) who claimed:

Since teachers' emotional intelligence and self-efficacy beliefs belong to high inference categories, they exert a considerable amount of influence on the process of critical thinking, problem solving, decision making etc. in EFL classrooms. As a result, the development of teacher IE competencies and self-efficacy beliefs deserve due consideration in both EFL teacher preparation programs and on job teacher professional development programs that can help raise and bring the desired outcomes of learning –academically and emotionally.

The studies suggested the responsibility of administrators to avail in necessary resources to language teaching. They asserted that language teachers need to have access to a variety of materials to make lessons attractive to learners. Classrooms should be equipped with modern equipments. Classes should also be arranged according to learners' level.

**Teachers' role:** According to Tuan and Mai (2015, p. 18), the teacher shoulders the dominant share of responsibility to improve students' oral presentation skills. They argued:

...they should first improve the performance conditions by giving their students time to prepare for a speaking task, teaching the students how to use mind map to generate ideas and giving students enough time to perform their tasks. Secondly, they should help their students' overcome inhibition and shyness by having friendly, helpful and cooperative behaviors to make students feel comfortable when speaking in the class, reminding students not to worry about making mistakes and giving them clear instructions and sufficient guidance. Thirdly, the teacher should personalize and simplify the topics in the textbook to make them easier, more interesting and relevant to their lives.

Similarly, Akter (ND) suggested that teachers can increase learners' readiness and engagement by preparing learning materials and discussions about the students' own culture, values etc. to enliven the interest about the lessons and to be more motivated about the language. Dawit and Demis (2015) take the teacher's role a bit further and argue that teachers should also be more thoughtful, less covert in their

evaluation to encourage students. They also argued for a more horizontal (peer) task allocation and evaluation habits since students seem to be at more ease while with peers than teachers.

Abebe and Narayana (2016) argue that the teacher should also function as a viable role model for a remarkable presentation by preparing his/her delivery in a lively, well-organized and engaging fashion.

Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009, p. 43) add to the above idea of teacher as role model towards a 'teacher as a researcher' model.

Teachers need to assume the role of the researcher in their own classrooms. Before employing strategies to help students overcome foreign language speaking anxiety, foster motivation, and increase foreign language performance, practitioners should get to know their students, their attitudes toward oral production, and to shed light into the reasons that underlie their low performance and their unwillingness to engage in speaking activities.

In general, teacher's role is not an easy one because oral presentation is challenging job for teachers, like in lesson planning. Teachers move from the traditional role of teacher as an authority's expert to the new role of facilitator of learning. In addition, teachers need to prepare their students for the work. Teachers still play a key role in the background, as facilitators, research guides, ultimate references and source of encouragement. Their role in oral presentation is guiders, organizers, consultants, resource persons, and supporters. These roles involve also organizing into groups, preparing details, more information about the topic, helping them to learn how to use visual aids in their presentation, and finally, evaluation of the students' performance.

### **3. Research methods**

This study was conducted for one year, from October 2022- June 2023. Several key research methods are employed subsequently. The primary data sources include direct observations of students' oral presentations in the classroom settings, interviews with student participants. The interview helps to gather the students' perspectives and to delve deeper into specific aspects of oral presentation skills. Thirdly, post-training test was implemented to check whether or not the students made the necessary behavioral changes.

The population of the study was 386, which is the total number of 2022/23 graduating undergraduate students of College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Jimma University Ethiopia). The students' survey helped to get the statistical biodata of graduating classes from the registrar office and coordinating office of the programs

(letters of ethical clearance were obtained from both offices and included in the supplementary materials). The number of graduating students in each program is indicated table 1 below.

**Table 1: Graduating students of Social Sciences and Humanities (2022/23)**

No.	Program	Total	No.	Program	Total
	Bachelor of Arts			Bachelor of Education	
1.	Afan Oromo and Literature	34	1.	Afan Oromo	15
2.	Amharic Language and Literature	17	2.	Amharic	14
3.	English Language and Literature	24	3.	English	10
4.	Geography and Environmental Studies	46	4.	Geography	9
5.	History and Heritage Management	30	5.	History	10
6.	Media and Communication Studies	22		<b>Sum Total</b>	58
7.	Music	3			
8.	Oromo Folklore and Literature	27			
9.	Social Anthropology	33			
10.	Social Work	26			
11.	Sociology	50			
12.	Theatre Arts	16			
	<b>Sum Total</b>	<b>328</b>			

(Source: College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Jimma University)

As can be seen from the above table, among the 17 programs, 12 are Bachelor of Arts, whereas 5 are Bachelor of Education.

A purposive sampling method was utilized to select participants based on specific criteria related to their oral presentation skills. For observation, purposive sampling was employed as 5 students from every program (17) were observed twice, i.e.  $5 \times 17 \times 2 = 170$ . It is assumed that this sample size is adequate to ensure that the findings are representative and generalizable. In the context of interview, a sample size of 17 students, which means one student from each program, were selected

using lottery method and asked to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues and interventions.

For the training session, which is the intervention, after the identification of the problems, all Bachelor of Education students (=58, see table 1 above) were considered using purposive sampling method. Then, a one-month exhaustive training was provided. The reason for selecting Bachelor of Education students is mainly related to their profession. They would be teachers, and it is clear that teachers should be competent enough in their oral presentation skills

For data collection, a combination of observation checklist, semi-structured interview and post-training test are employed. Relevant documents were reviewed on issues related to students' oral presentation and formulated key observation guidelines that pertain to the particular study target. After the guiding cues for observation are developed into a checklist, a series of 170 (5students x 17 programs x 2) observations were made during students' oral presentation on selected courses. The observation sessions were conducted from October 03, 2022- December 30, 2022 (The observation checklist is provided as supplementary material).

With the implied key pointers that emerged during observation as well as related literature, interview questions were developed and shared with colleagues for comment on their clarity, appropriateness and validity. The interview questions, therefore, guided a semi-structured set of interview sessions which were conducted with selected 17 participants of the study (1 participant from each program) who were selected using lottery method. The interview was conducted for one month (February 2023).

During the course of data collection, training programs tailored to the specific needs of the target groups (social sciences and humanities students) were organized. These were designed after the observation and interview sessions, based on the findings, i.e. in March 2023. Once the validity and feasibility of the training material is evaluated by the relevant experts, implementation of the training was conducted to all bachelor of education students (58) for four weeks, from April 03-28, 2023. In order to avoid overlapping with regular classes and other commitments of the students, the training was during afternoon sessions. Finally, post-training tests were provided in May 2023 to measure the effectiveness of the interventions.

The data were systematically categorized and stored to facilitate easy retrieval and analysis. Then, thematic analysis was utilized to identify common patterns and themes in the data collected from observations, interviews and post-training test. This analysis focused on key aspects such as delivery skills, content organization,

and non-verbal communication. The discussion interpreted the findings in light of the existing literature, highlighting the implications of the study for enhancing oral presentation skills. It also addressed the effectiveness of the interventions implemented and provided recommendations for further practice.

#### 4. Data analysis

##### 4.1. Analysis of observation results

This section presents descriptive statistics of the data gathered through observation. The purpose of the study was to enhance students' oral presentation skills. Accordingly, 170 presenters (5 students x 17 programs x 2) were observed and assessed employing evaluation checklist when delivering an oral presentation in their respective courses. Each presentation took approximately from 8-10 minutes in length. The whole students were assigned into groups and instructed to prepare an oral presentation on certain selected topics from their courses with the assistance of their instructors. One student from each group was mainly responsible for delivering the presentation in front of the whole class. The researcher observed and evaluated the students' oral presentations throughout the data collection process.

The checklists were utilized to examine and record the students' oral presentation performance broadly based on three basic categories: delivery, content organization and presentation, and non-verbal communications skills. Each category includes specific statements which are apparent to each skill. In order to become more effective and objective, the observation checklists were scrutinized for credibility and validity after rigorous search of review literature and discussion with the whole team.

The students were, then, evaluated on the checklist based on the three basic categories on a scale range rating from excellent (3), good (2), fair (1) to unsatisfactory (0). The following three tables (table 2-4) depict the overall results of the students' oral presentation skills on the basis of the observation checklist.

**Table 2:** Delivery skills

No.	Criteria (Delivery skills)	3	2	1	0	Total
1.	The presenter maintains strong and adequate eye-contact with the audience	0	57	63	50	170
2.	The presenter makes eye contact with the whole room or class	28	0	113	29	170
3.	The presenter stands straight facing the audience	0	110	60	0	170

4.	The presenter speaks with clear voice and acceptable vocal variety	26	85	55	4	170
5.	The presenter speaks using good pace and pause when necessary	29	26	86	29	170
6.	The presenter seems relaxed, well-prepared and confident	22	15	115	18	170
7.	The presenter refers to his note or outline in a conversational mode	20	59	79	12	170
8.	The presenter uses the stage properly	18	26	34	92	170
9.	The presenter incorporates his/her voice tone with eye-contact	0	7	96	67	170
10.	The presenter reads his/her note or outline not word for word to the audience	15	4	104	47	170
11.	The presenter frequently looks down at his/her note for long periods	9	12	119	30	170

The observation checklist assesses delivery skills based on various criteria for 170 students. The data reveals strengths and areas for improvement in oral presentation. Based on the data provided, students face several challenges in their delivery skills. The issues include inadequate eye contact with the audience (113), lack of whole-room eye contact (142), inconsistent pace and pausing during speech (115), insufficient relaxation and confidence (133), over-reliance on notes or outlines (91), improper use of the stage (126), failure to integrate voice tone with eye contact effectively (163), reading notes word for word (151), and frequent prolonged periods of looking down at notes (149). These challenges collectively impact the students' overall presentation effectiveness and engagement with the audience.

**Table 3: Content organization and presentation skills**

No.	Criteria (Content organization and presentation skills)	3	2	1	0	Total
1.	The presenter makes an appropriate, clear and interesting introduction	17	47	98	8	170
2.	The outline is well-written and complete	6	4	148	12	170
3.	The main points of the talk have been well-organized on the outline	0	18	129	23	170
4.	The outline contains brief notes rather than complete texts	12	61	87	10	170
5.	Numerals and letters have been used to	5	93	21	51	170

	distinguish main points from subordinate ones					
6.	Makes a reasonably clear and logical progression within and between ideas throughout the whole presentation	27	12	116	15	170
7.	The body of the speech reflects adequate clarity in organization	14	79	30	47	170
8.	The content of the presentation follows a clear structure for listeners to follow	33	108	16	13	170
9.	The conclusion reflects adequately the content of the speech and leaves a majority of the audience with a clear message or call to action	39	27	73	31	170
10.	The ideas presented are minimally enhanced by the visual aid(s)	11	15	93	51	170
11.	Visual aids are used effectively and appropriately supporting the presentation	2	27	74	67	170

According to the data from the observation, out of the 170 students presented, there are varying levels of performance across different criteria. For instance, the introduction received 17 excellent, 47 good, 98 fair, and 8 unsatisfactory ratings. Similarly, the outline completeness had 6 excellent, 4 good, 148 fair, and 12 unsatisfactory ratings. The breakdown continues across all criteria, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement in students' presentation skills. This data allows for a comprehensive assessment of how students are performing in terms of content organization and presentation quality, providing insights into where enhancements may be needed to improve overall presentation effectiveness.

**Table 4:** Non-verbal communication skills

No.	Criteria (Non-verbal communication skills)	3	2	1	0	Total
1.	Demonstrates acceptable posture and facial expressions	92	57	18	3	170
2.	Uses appropriate gestures and eye contact	67	62	30	11	170
3.	Appeared relaxed/comfortable and confident	9	23	84	54	170
4.	Gains control of distracting and nervous mannerisms	31	77	52	10	170
5.	Maintains physical appearance and movement in an appropriate manner	16	42	85	27	170
6.	Demonstrate confidence and Energy through his/her physical appearance	22	72	63	13	170

In table 4, it is evident that several key issues arise on students' non-verbal communication skills during presentations. For example, gestures and eye contact are essential for audience engagement, yet a significant number (41) of students did not utilize these effectively. Moreover, nearly all students (138) appeared lacking in confidence and comfort during their presentations, potentially hindering their overall delivery. Control of mannerisms was also a concern, as 37 students struggled to manage distracting behaviors that could detract from their message.

#### 4.2. Analysis of interview results

The interview was held with 17 participants who were selected from all graduating students of the college. Based on the data obtained from students through semi-structured interview, it is found that students do have good feelings towards oral presentation when they are invited to do. Most (13 students or 76.5%) of participants showed that they would start getting prepared and organized to properly address the intended message. However, the rest of the respondents confirmed that they feel rather uncomfortable if they are invited to have oral presentation for grading purpose and when it is unplanned and spontaneous. For example, one of the respondents literally responded the following idea:

*I feel quite nervous and anxious when asked to give an oral presentation in the classroom. The idea of speaking in front of my peers makes me feel self-conscious and worried about making mistakes. I often struggle with public speaking, which adds to my overall feeling of discomfort and insecurity. (I-6<sup>1</sup>)*

It is understood that students face various difficulties during oral presentation. Only some participants stated they do not experience difficulties during oral presentation, but most of students mentioned some of the difficulties they face; for instance: fear of audience, subject matter, nervousness, and anxiety and language difficulty was mentioned. Students explained that they start shivering, sweating and stuttering etc. as some manifestations of getting nervous during oral presentation. But it is recognized that such kind of feelings come situational.

Most of the respondents (10) were in support of the idea of the role of non-verbal communications (facial expressions, body movement, signs etc.) during oral presentation as it enhances the effectiveness of communication and helps to keeps the attention and interaction of listeners in track. For instance, one of the interviewees explained as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> I-6 = Interviewee 6;

*... I believe that non-verbal communication plays a crucial role in effective communication. Facial expressions, body movement, and signs can convey emotions, intentions, and messages that words alone may not be able to express. (I-2<sup>2</sup>)*

On the contrary, students often struggle to implement in the classroom what they know about non-verbal communication, as described by one the interviewees:

*...I have observed that many of my classmates struggle with non-verbal communication during their presentations. From nervousness to distracting mannerisms, these issues can detract from the overall effectiveness of our message... (I-13<sup>3</sup>)*

On the other hand, the participants had the same attitude towards preparing outlines to conduct oral presentation. They explained that having outline on the subject of presentation makes them confident, allows them to deliver the intended message with no fragment, removes fear of loss of central ideas, minimizes difficulty of expressions and supports time management and appropriate order of ideas. Below is an excerpt from one of the interviewees.

*Having a clear outline on the subject of my presentation is crucial for me. It makes me confident, allows me to deliver the intended message without any fragments, removes the fear of losing central ideas, minimizes the difficulty of expressions, and supports time management and maintaining the appropriate order of ideas. (I-4<sup>4</sup>)*

When students were asked to mention the factors which hinder their effective oral presentation, they mentioned the causes, such as language incompetence, fear of audience, nervousness, jump over thoughts, environmental factors, classroom situation, the teaching, learning methodology and improper use of time. These problems are also detected during the observations of their presentations.

## **5. Discussion**

Examining students' oral presentation skills offers valuable insights into their strengths and areas for improvement in delivery, content organization, and non-verbal communication. This discussion explores the key findings from observations and interviews, focusing on the challenges students encounter and how these findings can be used to enhance their presentation effectiveness.

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<sup>2</sup> I-2 = Interviewee 2

<sup>3</sup> I-13 = Interviewee 13

<sup>4</sup> I-4= Interviewee 4

**Delivery skills:** The assessment of delivery skills involved evaluating the speaker's performance in both non-verbal and verbal aspects of the presentation. Non-verbal skills, such as eye contact, confidence, and stage presence, were key factors considered. The analysis revealed that a significant number of speakers struggled to establish and sustain proper eye contact with the audience. Some students were observed gazing at the ceiling, failing to engage with the entire class, while others opted to focus on reading their notes or outlines without making eye contact with their peers throughout the presentation duration.

**Content organization and presentation skills:** Evaluation of content organization and presentation skills focused on the preparation of outlines, the use of visual aids, and more importantly on the structural organization of each part (introduction, body, and conclusion) of a presentation.

- (i) **Introduction:** The success of the introduction in a presentation hinge on two key elements: captivating the audience with an engaging opening and providing a comprehensive overview of the entire presentation. Neglecting these aspects can lead to a lackluster presentation. It was observed that most presenters failed to kick off their presentations by outlining the content and clearly stating the purpose of their speech in a structured manner for the audience to follow. Consequently, many presenters hurried straight into the content without setting the stage effectively.
- (ii) **Body:** It was evident that many presenters struggled with maintaining a clear and logical progression of ideas throughout their talks. They often failed to transition smoothly between different points and lacked a cohesive structure overall. Additionally, their outlines were overly detailed with full sentences rather than concise notes, which hindered the flow of their presentations. Surprisingly, most presenters did not utilize visual aids to enhance their message, missing out on an opportunity to improve the organization and delivery of their presentations. In essence, employing proper outlines and visual aids can significantly enhance the overall organization and flow of a presentation.
- (iii) **Conclusion:** Two key aspects were deemed crucial for assessing the concluding segment of a presentation. The initial point emphasized the importance of reiterating the presentation's specific purpose to the audience and engaging them by seeking their opinions, suggestions, and comments. Nearly all presenters effectively solicited audience feedback. Conversely, the majority of presenters failed to summarize or draw conclusions at the end of their presentations.

Non-verbal communication skills: Numerous elements downplay the significance of nonverbal communication. Non-verbal communication by speakers involves their presentation without speaking. Key areas of nonverbal communication encompass facial expressions, gestures, and postures or appearance. Consequently, a majority of presenters were observed to engage in adequate nonverbal communication to a satisfactory extent. Nevertheless, issues persisted among many presenters in effectively using gestures in conjunction with eye contact to emphasize a point, as well as in maintaining an appropriate physical appearance and movement.

## **6. Implementation of the intervention (Training)**

As per the action plan set on the basis of the findings, the researcher intervened to tackle the challenges the target students commonly faced while delivering oral presentations for different courses. Accordingly, trainings were delivered for four weeks, April 03-28, 2023, for 2-hours every day during week days. The training dealt with organization skills, which mainly touch technical issues in oral presentations. It also covered delivery skills, which dominantly relate to psychological phenomena. (The manual that contains the contents of the overall implementation of the training is provided as a supplementary material.)

## **7. Evaluation of the intervention (Training)**

The topic of this study was primarily selected based on the shared experience while teaching undergraduate students who generally demonstrate lack of self confidence, language difficulty and content organization while conducting classroom presentation.

As Hine (2013) argues that professionals who are working in the education system with a systematic, reflective approach should address areas of need within their respective domains. Therefore, the researcher, as a language pedagogist, has employed his prior and current experiences as well as readings to initiate, guide and further scrutinize and intervene in students' lack of presentation skills in different fields of study in College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Jimma University.

By helping practitioners (teacher trainees in this case; Hine, 2013) reflect in their own working environment, this study mainly intends to eventually bring about relevant changes within their own context. Accordingly, the researcher has used the results of the data collection (interview and observation) to inform the intervention within the participants of this particular research; graduating undergraduate students in the university.

### **7.1. Challenges**

After the data collection was completed and the conclusions drawn from analysis, the researcher had faced slight challenges of finding a convenient time for training due to students' busy schedule with classes as well as senior essay preparation. However, the researcher with collaboration of students have finally managed to hold the afternoon phases for the training.

Another problem, even though it was initially difficult for the student participants to actively engage in the training activities for the first few days, the training sessions were eventually completed as planned.

### **7.2. Techniques of assessment on the intervention tool**

After the intervention trainings were conducted, the participants were invited to voluntarily conduct a presentation on a topic of their choice (from the courses they were studying at the time) so as to observe if there were improvements. The trainees disseminated a brief evaluation form for 29 participants who were selected using lottery method. They, then, forwarded their comments about the importance and method of the trainings. Besides, two colleagues of the Department of English Language and Literature were invited for a brief participation in the trainings for which they forwarded their suggestions up on completion. Furthermore, a 45 minutes long reflection session about the perception of students regarding the impacts of the intervention was conducted as an evaluation mechanism.

### **7.3. Evaluation of the effects of the interventions**

Evaluation of students' post-training presentation: The researcher observed 15 presentations of the participant students, each with 7-10 minutes long. A great deal of decrease in cues of nervousness (sweating, voice break-up and eye contact with audience) was observed among students. With regard to content organization, all presenters appeared with a piece of paper with a few key points written in bullet. However, problems of clarity, formality and richness in language use were observed in a degree very similar to the researcher's observation prior to intervention.

Students' evaluation of the intervention: Majority (25) of the respondents (86.2%) responded 'yes' to being asked whether they found the training helpful in any way, or not. Among the 29, 23 (79.39%) responded that the training was helpful for the improvement of their self-confidence while presenting. 14 (48.2%) said, it helped both their self confidence and preparation skills for presentation. Moreover, 27.6%

(8) respondents wrote additional importance of the training, such as “time management” and “use of presentation aids”.

None of the respondents selected the improvement of language skills as effects of the training, suggesting that this issue demands a more extensive intervention strategy. Other areas of concern that came out in open ended sections of the post-training assessment as well as reflection session included:

- Need for more frequent, longer trainings of similar type to help students develop their skills in presentation
- Importance of practicing English language and the habit of speaking confidently in non-academic settings
- Responsibility of teachers to encourage and reward students for students' efforts, etc.

## **8. Conclusion**

The study has been a profound exploration into the intricacies of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and the pivotal role of teachers in shaping students' abilities to communicate effectively. Through a comprehensive approach, key insights have emerged, shedding light on the challenges faced by students, the impact of interventions, and the transformative power of tailored training programs. The following are accordingly, the key points to be recalled from the findings.

**Understanding student challenges:** The research revealed a multitude of challenges or obstacles encountered by students during oral presentations. From battling nerves and anxiety to grappling with language proficiency and structuring, it was clear that numerous students confront stage fright and evaluation apprehension. These hurdles not only impede efficient communication but also influence students' self-assurance and academic performance.

**Implementing tailored interventions:** With a profound grasp of the challenges faced by students, the research team devised and executed a series of two brief training workshops aimed at tackling both psychological and technical obstacles impeding students' oral presentation abilities. These sessions targeted issues like anxiety and content structuring, as well as language proficiency, with the goal of empowering students to surmount their barriers and thrive in verbal communication.

**Overcoming challenges in implementation:** Despite the well-thought-out interventions, scheduling training sessions proved challenging due to students' packed academic calendars. Nevertheless, with collaborative efforts and unwavering determination, the research team managed to carry out the sessions,

albeit encountering some initial engagement issues. The commitment of both researchers and students guaranteed the achievement of training goals, leading to enhancements in oral presentation skills.

**Assessing the impact of interventions:** To assess the intervention's impact, participants were encouraged to deliver presentations after the training. This enabled direct observation of progress. Feedback was gathered from a sample of participants and peers through evaluation forms, offering valuable perspectives on the training's effectiveness. A reflection session was also organized to gather students' views on how the intervention influenced them, adding depth to the evaluation process.

**Embracing growth and learning:** The research project focusing on improving oral presentation skills showcases the effectiveness of targeted interventions, teamwork, and reflective strategies in nurturing student growth. By tackling psychological obstacles, honing technical abilities, and maintaining regular assessments, the project sought to not only boost students' oral communication prowess but also foster self-assurance and empowerment. Looking ahead, the insights gained from this initiative will lay the groundwork for continuous enhancements in teaching methods and student assistance, fostering a climate of strong communication skills and self-confidence among graduating students at Jimma University.

## **9. Recommendations**

The issue under investigation requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the identified challenges and effective strategies to empower students in their communication endeavors. Based on this research and the insights gleaned from the literature review and data analysis, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance students' oral presentation skills:

**Tailored training programs:** Design and execute customized short-term training initiatives that pinpoint and address specific improvement areas identified through careful observation, interviews, and data analysis. These programs will concentrate on enhancing delivery skills, refining non-verbal communication abilities, and optimizing content organization to empower students with the essential competencies needed for excelling in oral presentations.

**Emphasize practice and feedback:** Encourage students to actively participate in regular practice sessions aimed at honing their oral presentation skills within a nurturing setting. Offer constructive feedback that emphasizes strengths and areas for enhancement, fostering an iterative cycle of improvement. This consistent practice and feedback loop are vital for ongoing progress and skill development.

**Incorporate technology and visual aids:** Incorporate technology and visual aids into oral presentations to boost engagement and understanding. Encourage students to leverage multimedia tools like presentations, videos, and interactive visuals to enrich their verbal communication and elevate the impact of their presentations.

**Foster a supportive learning environment:** Foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment that empowers students to take risks and freely express themselves. Emphasize peer collaboration, group discussions, and peer evaluations to cultivate a strong sense of community and encourage shared learning experiences among students.

**Provide opportunities for real-world application:** Provide students with opportunities to practice their oral presentation skills in authentic settings, including simulated job interviews, public speaking engagements, and community service initiatives. By engaging in these hands-on experiences, students can boost their self-assurance and appreciate the importance of effective communication across different situations.

**Professional development for teachers:** Support teachers in enhancing their ability to guide and empower students in honing their oral presentation skills through ongoing professional development. Offer training in innovative teaching techniques, assessment methods, and the creation of a supportive learning atmosphere conducive to developing effective communication skills.

**Encourage self-reflection and goal setting:** Foster self-awareness and growth in students by prompting them to reflect on their own strengths and areas for improvement in delivering oral presentations. Encourage students to set goals and create action plans to monitor their progress and strive towards specific objectives in enhancing their oral communication abilities. By following these strategies, Jimma University can cultivate a dynamic learning environment that equips students to present confidently, articulately, and effectively. Through tailored training initiatives, constructive feedback loops, integration of technology, and emphasis on practical application, students will acquire the critical skills necessary to excel in oral communication and thrive in both academic and professional settings.

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I, the author, declare that there is no competing interest which could affect the publication of this manuscript.

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