

Student Perceptions and Experiences in English as a Second Language (ESL) Oral Presentations: A Phenomenological Investigation of Filipino Grade 8 Learners

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ABSTRACT: This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of Filipino ESL learners regarding classroom oral presentation activities, addressing critical gaps in understanding student perspectives on oral communication challenges in second language contexts. Fifteen Grade 8 students from Rizal High School, Pasig City, participated in comprehensive in-depth interviews designed to elicit detailed accounts of their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with oral presentations. Participants were purposively selected across high, middle, and low academic performance levels to ensure diverse representation. Using Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach, the study systematically analyzed student narratives to identify patterns illuminating the complex dynamics of oral presentation experiences. Five major themes emerged from the data analysis: prejudices in oral presentation, characterized by initial inhibitions and fears of negative feedback; engagement in oral presentation, reflecting recognition of personal gains and support systems; surviving the oral presentation, emphasizing constructive criticism acceptance and preparation time valuation; oral presentation as a means to overcome

challenging situations, highlighting adaptive techniques and self-reliance development; and oral presentation as a means to appreciate oneself, focusing on success feelings and accomplishment. Findings indicate that while students initially experience significant anxiety stemming from confidence and skill concerns, they ultimately recognize substantial value in oral presentations for linguistic competence improvement, confidence building, and future professional preparation. Students develop sophisticated coping strategies including relaxation techniques, systematic preparation approaches, and strategic visual aid use. The research reveals that negative preconceptions can be transformed through supportive environments, adequate preparation time, and constructive feedback practices. Teachers play crucial roles in creating encouraging atmospheres that promote participation and learning. These insights provide empirical foundation for developing learner-centered pedagogical approaches to enhance oral communication instruction in Philippine secondary education contexts.

Keywords: *oral presentation, phenomenology, ESL learners, speaking anxiety, communicative competence*

Introduction

The development of oral communication skills remains a critical challenge in English as a Second Language (ESL) education in the Philippines. Despite the implementation of the K to 12 curriculum emphasizing 21st-century skills including communication competence, many Filipino students continue to struggle with oral performance in English classes (Azagra, 2015). This phenomenon is particularly evident in classroom oral presentation activities, where students often exhibit reluctance to participate despite demonstrating proficiency in written tasks. The disconnect between students' receptive abilities in English and their productive oral skills creates a significant pedagogical challenge that requires deeper understanding of the underlying factors affecting student performance. Filipino ESL learners frequently demonstrate mastery of English grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, yet remain hesitant to engage in spoken communication activities, particularly those requiring public speaking in formal classroom settings.

The Philippine educational context presents unique sociolinguistic complexities that influence oral communication development. English serves as both a subject of study and a medium of instruction in Philippine schools, creating dual pressures for students who must navigate between their native language competencies and second language requirements. The country's multilingual environment, where Filipino and various regional languages coexist with English, often results in code-switching behaviors that students perceive as inadequate for formal presentation contexts. Additionally, cultural factors emphasizing respect for authority and fear of public embarrassment (known locally as "hiya") contribute to students' reluctance to engage in oral activities where mistakes might be publicly visible. These cultural and linguistic factors necessitate instructional approaches that acknowledge the complex identity negotiations Filipino students experience when using English for oral communication.

Oral presentations serve multiple pedagogical purposes in ESL contexts, functioning simultaneously as learning activities, assessment tools, and bridges between academic and professional communication requirements (Joughin, 2010). They provide authentic opportunities for language practice while developing critical thinking, research skills, and presentation competencies essential for academic and professional success. Furthermore, oral presentations create meaningful contexts for language use that extend beyond traditional grammar-focused exercises, allowing students to engage with content while practicing linguistic forms in purposeful communication scenarios. The integrated nature of oral presentations, requiring students to synthesize research, organize ideas, and communicate effectively, aligns with contemporary language learning theories emphasizing task-based and communicative approaches. However, the effectiveness of oral presentations depends largely on students' perceptions, emotional responses, and the instructional frameworks used to support their development as confident communicators.

Research has consistently demonstrated that student anxiety and negative perceptions can significantly impact oral presentation performance, often creating barriers that prevent students from demonstrating their actual linguistic competence (Al-Nouh et al., 2015; Aliyu et al., 2019). Studies across various ESL contexts have identified

common challenges including fear of making mistakes, concerns about pronunciation accuracy, anxiety about audience judgment, and lack of confidence in linguistic abilities. These affective factors often overshadow students' actual language competence, creating situations where capable learners underperform due to psychological rather than linguistic limitations. Understanding the lived experiences of ESL learners in oral presentation contexts becomes crucial for developing effective instructional approaches that address both linguistic skill development and affective factors in language learning. The phenomenological approach offers valuable insights into how students experience, interpret, and make meaning from their oral presentation activities, providing essential data for improving pedagogical practices.

This study aims to explore the phenomenological experiences of Filipino Grade 8 ESL learners in classroom oral presentation activities, focusing on their thoughts, feelings, and actual experiences to better understand the complexities of oral communication in second language learning contexts. By examining students' lived experiences through their own perspectives and voices, this research seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on learner-centered approaches to ESL instruction. The study's findings will inform the development of more effective pedagogical strategies that acknowledge both the challenges and opportunities inherent in oral presentation activities. Through detailed exploration of student experiences, this research aims to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge about oral communication instruction and practical understanding of how students actually experience these learning activities, ultimately contributing to improved educational practices that better serve Filipino ESL learners' needs.

Oral Presentation in ESL Education

Oral presentation is defined as a formal, structural, and systematic presentation of a message to an audience using visual and spoken language within a limited time frame (Tsang, 2020). This definition encompasses the multifaceted nature of oral presentations as complex communicative events that require integration of linguistic, cognitive, and performance skills. In ESL contexts, oral presentations serve as learner-centered activities that promote communicative competence development

through authentic language use experiences (Wilson & Brooks, 2014). These activities transform traditional teacher-fronted classrooms into dynamic learning environments where students take active roles as both presenters and engaged audience members. Cook (2015) emphasizes that teachers evaluate oral presentations based on both information quality and delivery effectiveness, recognizing that successful communication involves not only linguistic accuracy but also the ability to engage audiences and convey meaningful content. The dual focus on content and delivery reflects the integrated skills approach that characterizes effective ESL instruction, where language learning occurs through purposeful communication rather than isolated skill practice.

The purposes of oral presentations in language learning extend far beyond simple speaking practice, encompassing cognitive, linguistic, and social learning objectives that align with contemporary second language acquisition theories. Girard et al. (2011) identify three primary advantages: increasing classroom motivation through student-centered activities, enhancing learning interest by providing variety and authenticity in language practice, and improving communication and presentation skills essential for academic and professional contexts. These benefits reflect the motivational power of meaningful tasks that connect classroom learning to real-world applications. Furthermore, oral presentations bridge the gap between language learning and language use, providing authentic contexts for second language practice that mirror communication demands students will encounter beyond the classroom (King, 2002). The authenticity of oral presentation tasks lies in their requirement for students to synthesize information, organize ideas coherently, and communicate persuasively—skills that transfer directly to academic and professional contexts. Additionally, oral presentations promote learner autonomy by requiring students to take responsibility for their own learning, conduct independent research, and make decisions about content selection and presentation strategies. This autonomy development is particularly important in ESL contexts where students must eventually become independent users of English in various personal and professional domains.

Student Perceptions and Anxiety in Oral Presentations

Research consistently identifies anxiety as a primary factor affecting student performance in oral presentations, with studies across diverse ESL contexts revealing similar patterns of student apprehension and performance challenges. Al-Nouh et al. (2015) found that EFL college students experience moderate difficulty with oral presentations, with personal traits such as anxiety being the most significant challenge, surpassing even linguistic competence issues in their impact on performance quality. This finding underscores the critical importance of addressing affective factors in oral presentation instruction, as students' emotional responses often overshadow their actual linguistic abilities. Similarly, Aliyu et al. (2019) demonstrated that students' anxiety levels decrease through consistent practice with classroom interactions and oral presentations, suggesting that systematic exposure and skill-building approaches can effectively address performance anxiety. The research indicates that anxiety manifests in multiple dimensions, including fear of negative evaluation, concerns about linguistic accuracy, worry about audience reactions, and general performance apprehension that can significantly impair students' ability to demonstrate their actual English proficiency.

Hanifa and Yusra (2018) provided detailed analysis of common problems students encounter, including nervousness that affects vocal delivery, time constraints that create additional pressure, and mispronunciation concerns that reflect students' awareness of their linguistic limitations in public speaking contexts. Their research revealed that preparation strategies play crucial roles in managing these challenges, with students who engage in systematic preparation showing greater confidence and better performance outcomes. Students employ various coping strategies to manage presentation challenges, including building self-confidence through practice and positive self-talk, anticipating potential questions to reduce uncertainty, and using communication tactics like gestures and strategic code-switching to maintain communication flow when linguistic resources prove insufficient. These adaptive strategies demonstrate students' resourcefulness in navigating the complex demands of second language oral presentation, though they also highlight the need for instructional approaches that provide systematic support for both linguistic and

psychological preparation. The research further indicates that successful oral presentation experiences can create positive feedback loops, where initial success builds confidence that facilitates future participation and continued skill development.

Theoretical Framework: Experiential Learning and Communicative Competence

This study is anchored in Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, which posits that meaningful learning occurs through a cyclical four-stage process: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In oral presentation contexts, this theoretical framework provides a comprehensive lens for understanding how students develop communication competence through direct engagement with speaking tasks. During the concrete experience phase, students encounter the immediate reality of presenting in English, confronting both linguistic and affective challenges in authentic communication contexts. The reflective observation stage involves students examining their presentation experiences, analyzing what worked well and identifying areas for improvement, often through teacher feedback, peer responses, and self-assessment activities. Abstract conceptualization occurs as students synthesize their reflections with existing knowledge about effective communication, developing new understanding about presentation strategies, language use, and audience engagement techniques. Finally, active experimentation manifests as students apply their newly developed insights and strategies in subsequent presentation opportunities, testing refined approaches and building competence through iterative practice. This cyclical process emphasizes that oral presentation skills develop through sustained engagement rather than one-time performance events, making it essential for instructional approaches to provide multiple opportunities for students to progress through the learning cycle.

Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework provides additional theoretical grounding by offering a comprehensive sociolinguistic perspective on communicative competence that extends beyond purely linguistic considerations. The framework emphasizes eight critical components: Setting and Scene (physical and psychological contexts), Participants (speaker-audience relationships and roles), Ends (purposes and goals of

communication), Act sequence (message organization and content structure), Key (tone and manner of delivery), Instrumentalities (communication channels and linguistic codes), Norms of interaction (cultural and social expectations), and Genre (discourse type and conventions). In oral presentation contexts, this framework helps students develop awareness of how successful communication depends on appropriate adaptation to contextual factors rather than simply linguistic accuracy. For Filipino ESL learners, the SPEAKING framework is particularly relevant because it acknowledges the cultural and social dimensions of communication that significantly influence presentation effectiveness. Students must navigate between their familiar Filipino communication norms and the expectations of formal English presentation contexts, requiring sophisticated understanding of how language use varies across cultural and situational boundaries. The framework also validates students' use of multimodal communication strategies, including visual aids, gestures, and code-switching, as legitimate resources for achieving communicative goals rather than deficiencies to be eliminated.

The integration of Experiential Learning Theory and the SPEAKING framework creates a robust theoretical foundation that addresses both the learning process and the communicative competence goals of oral presentation instruction. Experiential Learning Theory explains how students develop presentation skills through repeated cycles of practice and reflection, while the SPEAKING framework provides specific guidance for what constitutes effective communication in various contexts. Together, these theories support instructional approaches that honor students' learning processes while building sophisticated understanding of communicative competence. This theoretical synthesis recognizes that effective oral presentation instruction must address both the development of linguistic skills and the cultivation of sociolinguistic awareness that enables students to adapt their communication strategies to diverse audiences and purposes. The combined framework also emphasizes that learning occurs through meaningful engagement with authentic communication tasks rather than through decontextualized skill practice, supporting the use of oral presentations as vehicles for integrated language learning. Furthermore, the theoretical foundation acknowledges that students bring valuable linguistic and cultural resources to oral

presentation contexts, positioning their multilingual competencies and cultural knowledge as assets rather than obstacles in developing English presentation skills.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design following Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach. Phenomenology focuses on understanding participants' conscious experiences and the meanings they attribute to specific phenomena (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015).

Participants

Fifteen Grade 8 students from Rizal High School, Pasig City, participated in the study. Participants were purposively selected from two sections (EBEC 5 and 6) to ensure representation across different academic performance levels in English. All participants were Filipino native speakers learning English as a second language. The demographic composition and academic performance distribution are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	12	80.0
	Male	3	20.0
Section	EBEC 5	8	53.3
	EBEC 6	7	46.7
Language Background	Filipino (L1)	15	100.0
	English (L2)	15	100.0
Total Participants		15	100.0

Table 2 Academic Performance Distribution in English

Performance Level	Description	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
High Performers	Students ranking in top third of class	5	33.3
Middle Performers	Students ranking in middle third of class	5	33.3
Low Performers	Students ranking in bottom third of class	5	33.3
Total		15	100.0

Note: Performance levels were determined based on cumulative English grades over the previous three academic quarters, with particular emphasis on oral performance tasks which constituted 50% of the overall grade.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted via Google Meet due to pandemic restrictions. Interviews lasted 30-45 minutes and were recorded for transcription. A semi-structured interview guide adapted from Yulianto (2016) explored participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences with oral presentations. Additional data were gathered through student journal entries using reflective guide questions.

Data Analysis

Following Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological steps, data analysis involved: (1) epoché - setting aside researcher assumptions; (2) horizontalization - clustering significant statements; (3) textual and structural descriptions; and (4) composite synthesis to identify the essence of experiences. ATLAS.ti software assisted in thematic analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The study received approval from school authorities and parental consent. Participants' anonymity was protected through pseudonyms, and participation was voluntary without academic consequences.

Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Prejudices in Oral Presentation

Initial Inhibition

Students' initial responses to oral presentations were characterized by anxiety and fear. Participants described experiencing nervousness, sweating hands, and mental blocks when contemplating oral presentations. Fe expressed: *"I felt nervous Ma'am, and then my hands started to perspire. I thought I might have made some mistakes in making my presentation."*

This anxiety stemmed primarily from lack of skills and confidence. Students feared making pronunciation errors, grammar mistakes, and being unable to answer questions. Ichie noted: *"I am not that confident in terms of oral presentations, sometimes I watch other presentations to check if I am doing the right thing."*

Negative Feedback from Others

Fear of judgment from classmates and teachers emerged as a significant concern. Students worried about negative reactions, criticism, and social embarrassment. Shella explained: *"I look at the posture of my classmates. I look into their eyes which makes me overthink more. I asked myself, what could they be telling me, I thought more on negative thoughts."*

These findings align with Amini et al.'s (2019) research indicating that EFL learners frequently experience foreign language anxiety, which can significantly impact oral presentation performance.

Theme 2: Engagement in Oral Presentation

Personal Gains

Despite initial anxieties, students recognized numerous benefits from oral presentation participation. Expression of oneself emerged as a primary motivation. Frannie stated: *"I love speaking in public; I love to express what I feel about that certain topic, about my belief, about my opinions."*

Linguistic skill improvement was another significant gain. Students reported vocabulary expansion, pronunciation practice, and grammar development. Ken

noted: *"I got to discover many words, and I got to learn vocabulary words, so I felt confident in making sentences."*

Confidence building represented a crucial outcome. Participants described how repeated practice increased their self-assurance. As one student explained: *"You will be confident as you continue to do oral presentations, you will be used to it, then, you will become good at it."*

Support System

Family support played a vital role in students' oral presentation experiences. Fe mentioned: *"I am daddy's girl. My dad feels so proud when I perform orally. That's why, I am doing my best."* Teachers' encouragement and peer support also contributed to positive experiences.

Theme 3: Surviving the Oral Presentation ***Accepting Constructive Criticism***

Students demonstrated resilience in accepting feedback when delivered constructively. Frannie explained: *"I feel happy because they are correcting the mistakes. It's like they are telling you the correct grammar usage."* This acceptance facilitated learning and improvement in subsequent presentations.

Valuing Preparation Time

Preparation emerged as crucial for successful presentations. Students emphasized research, practice, and rehearsal as essential components. Maria noted: *"I really prepared when I was doing an oral presentation and if I make mistakes, it's minimal."*

Theme 4: Overcoming Challenging Situations

Students developed various adaptation techniques including relaxation methods (breathing exercises, prayer), psychological strategies (positive self-talk, visualization), and skill enhancement approaches (practicing with stuffed animals, recording themselves). The use of visual aids was consistently mentioned as helpful for both presenters and audiences.

Theme 5: Appreciating Oneself

Successful completion of oral presentations led to feelings of accomplishment and self-appreciation. Students described rewarding themselves and feeling proud of their achievements. Rosalie shared: *"I feel successful when I finish it and I learned something from what I did. I am rewarding myself like I will buy foods that I like."*

Conclusions and Recommendations

This phenomenological investigation reveals that Filipino ESL learners' experiences with oral presentations are profoundly complex, involving intricate negotiations between initial apprehensions and eventual recognition of personal and academic growth opportunities. The research demonstrates that students' oral presentation journeys follow predictable patterns, beginning with significant anxiety stemming from concerns about linguistic inadequacy, fear of peer judgment, and uncertainty about performance expectations. However, these initial negative emotions gradually transform through engagement with supportive instructional practices and meaningful presentation experiences. While students initially experience anxiety and fear rooted in legitimate concerns about pronunciation accuracy, grammatical correctness, and audience reception, sustained engagement in oral presentations provides substantial benefits including measurable linguistic development, progressive confidence building, and enhanced self-appreciation. The transformation process is neither automatic nor uniform across students, requiring careful attention to individual needs, cultural sensitivities, and systematic skill-building approaches that acknowledge both the challenges and potential of oral presentation activities in ESL contexts.

The study demonstrates that students' negative preconceptions about oral presentations can be systematically transformed through implementation of evidence-based instructional practices that address both cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning. Supportive classroom environments characterized by mutual respect, constructive feedback cultures, and celebration of effort over perfection create conditions where students feel safe to take linguistic risks necessary for communication development. Adequate preparation time emerges as a critical

factor, with students consistently emphasizing that rushed presentation assignments increase anxiety while thorough preparation builds confidence and improves performance quality. The research indicates that two-week preparation periods allow students to engage in meaningful research, practice delivery techniques, seek family and peer support, and develop familiarity with presentation content that reduces performance anxiety. Constructive feedback delivered through caring, growth-oriented approaches helps students view mistakes as learning opportunities rather than personal failures, fostering resilience and motivation for continued participation. Teachers play a crucial role in orchestrating these supportive conditions, functioning not merely as evaluators but as facilitators, encouragers, and skilled observers who recognize and nurture emerging communication competence while addressing individual student needs and concerns.

The implications of these findings extend beyond immediate classroom applications to broader questions about ESL pedagogy, teacher preparation, and educational policy in Philippine contexts. The research suggests that current approaches to oral communication instruction may inadequately address the complex interplay between linguistic, psychological, and cultural factors that influence student performance in presentation activities. Effective oral presentation instruction requires systematic attention to students' holistic development as communicators, incorporating explicit instruction in presentation skills, sustained practice opportunities, and assessment approaches that recognize growth over time rather than single-performance snapshots. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of viewing students' multilingual competencies and cultural backgrounds as resources rather than deficits, suggesting that successful ESL instruction builds upon rather than replaces students' existing linguistic and cultural knowledge. The phenomenological approach reveals that student voice and experience must be central to instructional design, as educator assumptions about student needs may differ significantly from students' actual experiences and perspectives. These insights contribute to growing recognition that learner-centered approaches to ESL instruction require deep understanding of how students experience, interpret, and make meaning from their language learning activities.

Recommendations

1. **Teacher Training:** Provide professional development focused on creating supportive oral presentation environments and delivering constructive feedback.
2. **Preparation Time:** Allow adequate time for student preparation, including research, practice, and rehearsal opportunities.
3. **Support Systems:** Encourage family involvement and peer support in oral presentation activities.
4. **Visual Aids:** Promote the use of pictures and visual materials to enhance presentation effectiveness and reduce student anxiety.
5. **Gradual Progression:** Implement scaffolded approaches beginning with low-stakes presentations and gradually increasing complexity.
6. **Assessment Practices:** Develop rubrics that emphasize effort and improvement alongside performance quality.

Future research should explore the effectiveness of specific intervention strategies and examine oral presentation experiences across different educational levels and contexts.

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