

Development of Speech Assistant Tool for Enhancing University Students' Oral Presentation Proficiency: A Needs Analysis

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Abstract

Oral presentation skills are a highly valued core competency that pre-employment students and graduates should acquire prior to entering the competitive employment sector. However, studies and reports have demonstrated a widening gap between graduates' proficiency in oral presentations and the industry's demands. Graduates' oral presentation performance was reported to be unsatisfactory and workplace presentations are viewed as intimidating by many graduates. These issues necessitate a needs analysis to develop a Speech Assistant Tool (SAT)

that can assist students in improving their oral presentation skills. A descriptive research design and a cross-sectional survey research were utilised. A questionnaire consisting of four (4) sections was used to analyse the students' needs. The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms to randomly-selected students from two public universities in Malaysia. A total of 179 responses were attained and were subjected to data cleaning, which revealed a total of 147 usable responses. A descriptive analysis was conducted to understand the students' views on all language skills and their current proficiency in technological skills. A t-test was conducted to examine if there is a significant difference in the needed oral presentation skills, concepts, and learning strategies for the development of SAT between male and female students. The t-test results reported no significant difference between the male and female students. The findings, therefore, proved that students from different universities are experiencing similar issues in oral presentations which necessitate the SAT.

Keywords: oral presentation, presentation skills, needs analysis, speech assistant tool, communication skill

1. Introduction

The globalisation of the economy has contributed to competitiveness in the labour market due to the misalignment between the supply of job opportunities and the number of graduates. The acquisition of soft skills as reported by the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Malaysia Ministry of Education, 2015) is related to the employability of graduates entering the employment sector. Therefore, the key to facilitating graduates' career success is to assure that pre-employment students are adept at the knowledge and soft skills related to their areas of specialisation before entering the workforce.

Oral communication skills are broad and abstract to many as the abilities encompass many subskills (Chung et al., 2016; Coffelt et al., 2016). In Malaysia, graduates' employability is prioritised as a national agenda, as it is an indicator to measure the marketability of graduates, which highlights the significance of oral communication skills ("Graduate Employability", 2020). This is evidenced by the primary concern of many learning institutions to ensure that their students are prepared for the workplace (Jalleh et al., 2021). In Abidin et al.'s (2017) study, the employers interviewed noted that excellent oral communicative competence would facilitate students to secure more job opportunities. Despite oral communication being established as a core competency, much less is known about students' oral presentation skills. Oral presentation skill is essential to facilitate hiring managers assessing and distinguishing the quality and suitability of graduates (Živković, 2014). Communicating using presentations is ubiquitous in many work-related situations, such as meetings, pitching sessions, and job interviews. Yet, minimal effort has been taken to equip students with the knowledge of presentation skills (Tsang, 2020). The plethora of research has shown that oral presentation skills are a critical issue requiring further examination.

1.1 Need for Oral Presentation Skills

The need for good oral presentation skills among university students has been thoroughly

highlighted in many reports. Intermediate oral communication skills are crucial to be developed among university students to prepare them for professional life (Haldane et al., 2017). Graduates are expected to acquire and demonstrate not only specialist subject knowledge but also the necessary soft skills to communicate well with others, whether those within their professional field or non-experts in general (Kunioshi et al., 2012; Singh, 2021; Thomas et al., 2016; Živković, 2014). While oral communication has been differentiated from oral presentations, much research has emphasised the need for students to learn how to prepare, organise, and deliver effective oral presentations for professional purposes (Živković, 2014) with adequate feedback to continuously improve their skills (Nadolski et al., 2021).

To cater to the demands for better oral presentation and communication skills in the workplace, numerous studies have been conducted to examine oral presentation skills among university students. More recently, efforts have been made by researchers to identify new learning strategies to teach oral presentation skills. For instance, Garces and Black (2015) introduced the elevator speech method of presenting to enable pharmaceutical science students to communicate scientific research to a non-expert audience. They found the necessity to ensure that the format of a presentation is established and communicated clearly when developing a soft skills training programme for oral presentation skills. They also mentioned the importance of improved assessment tools to facilitate the learning outcomes of the intervention. A similar study was conducted by Heideman and Laury (2021) who asked students to deliver one-minute presentations before receiving immediate feedback to improve their skills. The format allowed the students to have more practice sessions for their oral presentations, followed by specific feedback to improve with each subsequent presentation. Another study used virtual reality to simulate different environments requiring oral presentation skills and combat speaking anxiety in students (Alsaffar, 2021).

1.2 Establishing the Need for a Speech Assistant Tool

Despite the need for oral presentation competence for graduate employability, the competence is difficult to grasp as it involves many subskills. The identification of the required knowledge, skills, and learning strategies thus requires an assessment of the needs of learners to best design an appropriate intervention to help meet those needs. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), target needs refers to what learners need to do in the target situation, while learning needs refers to what learners need to do in order to learn. This is a simple formula where conducting a needs assessment first begins with having the potential users of the tool identify where they believe they need to be in comparison to where they currently stand in order to identify the lack in between that necessitates a learning intervention (or, in the case of this study, the speech assistant tool). Thus, for this study, apart from common oral presentation knowledge, skills, and strategies as discussed previously, the needs assessment should also cover the considerations of technology and gender in the design of an appropriate speech assessment tool, as discussed below.

1.2.1 Technological Assistance for Oral Presentations

Barrett and Liu (2016) explained that the current research trends have slowly departed from acknowledging students' needs to achieve near-native proficiency as a prerequisite for

achieving a high level of communicative competence. Instead, the focus has been on the discussion of English as a *lingua franca*, where the mastery of knowledge and the ability to communicate such knowledge is more valued than the native speakers' accuracy. Focus has shifted from harnessing grammatical accuracy and correct pronunciation to developing speaking competence and addressing students' abilities to communicate fluently with more confidence through what is called "functional nativeness".

The increasing need for students with good oral communication skills, along with instructors' limitations to teach presentation skills, has thus given rise to computer-assisted language learning, including for oral presentations. Past research has highlighted the value of virtual reality (Alsaffar, 2021; Boetje & van Ginkel, 2020) and the use of videos as additional resources to help students improve their oral presentation skills. According to Barrett and Liu (2016), students' ability to refer to resources online also builds valuable independent learning skills, which will prove to be valuable in the workplace later on. Yet, despite the emphasis placed on the need for oral presentation skills and the wealth of opportunities present with computer-assisted language learning to help develop these skills, little support is available for students to deliver presentations well, with students often repeating the same mistakes when delivering their presentations (Tsang, 2020).

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, much research has been dedicated to understanding the various uses of technology in tertiary education. While many studies have reported successes in remote and/or online and distance learning, researchers have also identified common challenges such as issues of accessibility, technological inequality, and ICT skills level among students (Batubara, 2021). The study by Bond et al. (2021) suggests that due to a lack of experience and expertise, new educators may face challenges in diversifying the way they use online teaching tools apart from traditional synchronous collaboration tools and video conferencing. This shortcoming necessitates further investigation to identify the most appropriate technology platform accessible to students.

1.2.2 Gender Differences in Oral Presentations

The literature indicates a slight difference in oral presentation competence between male and female presenters. This discovery emphasises that gender difference is an element that needs to be considered in oral presentation and by default, for the development of a Speech Assistant Tool (SAT). This is evidenced by the findings of Zali et al.'s (2022) study in which gender was found to be significantly related to the apprehension experienced during oral presentations. In line with this discovery is the study by Svenkerud et al. (2013) who observed significant differences in oral presentation proficiencies between male and female students. An extensive analysis using video recordings revealed that female students demonstrated higher audience engagement and are better prepared while male students are reliant on scripts and conduct their oral presentations without the necessary emotions. However, this finding contradicts Bhati's (2012) study which found that male students performed much better in oral presentation compared to female students. This can be attributed to an observation made by Núñez-Peña et al. (2016) who concluded that female students have a tendency to demonstrate higher levels of anxiety when partaking in an assessment. The previous studies therefore have established the

necessity to incorporate gender differences in the development of SAT.

1.3 Motivations of the Study

The literature indicates a scarcity of studies that explore the possibility of an online speech assistant tool that can aid students in delivering more quality oral presentations. Therefore, this study utilises the design and development of a research model to assess the needs of learners in the development of an SAT that specifically focuses on assisting students in the preparation stages of an oral presentation. This model was employed to establish new procedures, techniques, and tools based on specific needs analysis (Richey & Klein, 2007). Therefore, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What are the students' perceptions of their language proficiency and ICT skills?
2. What are the students' perceptions of the needed oral presentation skills, concepts and learning strategies for a Speech Assistant Tool (SAT)?
3. Is there a significant difference in the mean scores of needed oral presentation skills, concepts and learning strategies for a Speech Assistant Tool (SAT) between male and female students?

2. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design and a cross-sectional survey to collect data. The questionnaire consists of three (3) sections. Section A enquires the respondents' demographic characteristics, i.e. their gender, university, and programme clusters. Section A queries their language proficiency, perceived information and communication technology (ICT) skill, and the type of devices they own, the aim being to first establish the current state and desired state of the students' skills based on Hutchinson and Waters (1987). Section B consists of nineteen (19) items adapted from Md. Ngadiran (2020) on language needs for oral presentation and speech writing. Section C encompasses nine (9) items on the usability of devices. Section D comprises twenty-one items adapted from Md. Ngadiran (2020). This section aimed to evaluate the students' perception of the design of the Speech Assistant Tool (SAT). The questionnaire was submitted to two experts to establish the instrument's content validity.

The questionnaire was piloted to three (3) classes, and thirty-two (32) responses were received. Several amendments were performed based on the feedback from the pilot study. The first item that was modified in the questionnaire was "Choose the most appropriate level of importance for the following language skills", which was amended to "In your opinion, what is the ideal proficiency level for the following language skills?". The option *not applicable* was removed and the scale was modified to *not at all important* (1), *low importance* (2), *slightly important* (3), *moderately important* (4), *very important* (5), and *extremely important* (6). The second item was reworded from "Choose the most appropriate level of importance for the following oral presentation components" to "In your opinion, how important are the following oral presentation components?". The scale of this question was also changed to *beginner proficiency* (1), *elementary proficiency* (2), *intermediate proficiency* (3), *upper intermediate proficiency*

(4), *advanced proficiency* (5), and *native proficiency* (6) for both questions. These changes were implemented to mirror the previous questions and prevent confusion among respondents. This modification also enabled us to compare the current level with the desired level of students' language proficiency skills. The scale in Section D was also converted from a four-point Likert scale consisting of *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *agree* (3), and *strongly agree* (4) to an interval scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *> strongly agree* (5) to ensure that the data obtained are more independent.

Once the questionnaire had been amended, it was distributed online using Google Forms to randomly-selected respondents from the language faculty of University A and University B. The data collection took approximately three (3) months and resulted in a total of 179 responses. Data cleaning using Microsoft Excel revealed a total of 147 usable responses. SPSS was used to conduct the needed analyses of the stipulated research question of this study. Reliability analysis was performed on three constructs. The Cronbach's alpha values of the three constructs demonstrated high reliability as they exceeded 0.6 (Hoque & Awang, 2019). The first construct, needed oral presentation skills (OPS), attained a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.973, while the second construct, concepts (CON) needed for an SAT, obtained an alpha value of 0.899. The final construct, learning strategies (LS) for an SAT, scored an alpha value of 0.827. Subsequently, descriptive analysis was performed to understand the respondents' characteristics and answer the first two research questions. Then, a t-test was conducted to examine if there is a significant difference between male and female students for the three aforementioned constructs.

3. Results

The findings pertaining to the research questions are presented and discussed after the demographic profile section.

3.1 Demographic Profile

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

Demographic Profile	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	55	37.4
Female	92	62.6
University		
University A	95	64.6
University B	52	35.4
Programme Clusters		
Business and Management	36	24.5
Social Sciences and Humanities	12	8.2
Science and Technology	99	67.3

The respondents of this study were undergraduates from two different public universities. Ninety-five respondents were from University A, while 52 students were from University B. Fifty-five respondents were male (37.4%) and 92 were female (62.6%). In terms of programme clusters, 36 respondents (24.5%) are from Business and Management, 12 respondents (8.2%) are from Social Sciences and Humanities, and 99 respondents (67.3%) are from the Science and Technology programme cluster.

Table 2. Device ownership

Device Ownership	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Laptop/Notebook	6	4.1
Smartphones	5	3.4
Laptop/Notebook & Smartphones	111	75.5
Tablet/iPad & Smartphones	3	2.0
Laptop/Notebook & Tablet/iPad	2	1.4
Laptop/Notebook & Tablet/iPad & Smartphones	20	13.6

The majority of the students (111 students, 75.5%) owned both a laptop/notebook and a smartphone. Twenty respondents (13.6%) owned a laptop/notebook, a tablet/iPad, and a smartphone. Only 6 students (4.1%) owned only a laptop/notebook, while 5 students (3.4%) only owned a smartphone. Three respondents (2.0%) owned laptop/laptops and smartphones, while 2 respondents (1.4%) owned laptop/laptops and tablet/iPad. The finding indicates that most of the respondents will be able to access an SAT.

3.2 Research Question 1

The first research question sought to gauge the university students' self-perceived English language proficiency and ICT skills. Understanding their proficiency level of these skills enables tailoring an SAT for university students.

Table 3. Respondents' self-perceived language proficiency

MUET	Self-Perceived Language Proficiency	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Band 1 or Band 2	Basic	21	14.3
Band 3 or Band 4	Independent	122	83.0
Band 5 or 5+	Proficient	4	2.7

The respondents' self-perceived language proficiency was measured using their Malaysian University English Test (MUET) results. The respondents were denoted as having "basic" level of language proficiency if they obtained Band 1 or Band 2, "independent" level if they achieved Band 3 or Band 4, and "proficient" level if they acquired Band 5 and Band 5+ for the test. The descriptors— "basic", "independent", and "proficient"—were based on Common European

Framework of Reference (CEFR). Looking at the self-perceived language proficiency of the respondents, 21 (14.3%) of them possess “basic” level of language proficiency, while 122 (83.0%) (the majority) demonstrated “independent” level of language proficiency. Only 4 (2.7%) of the respondents scored a “proficient” level of language proficiency.

Table 4. Respondents’ self-perceived ICT skills

Self-Perceived ICT Skills	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1	0	0
2	0	0
3	1	7.0
4	3	2.0
5	12	8.2
6	23	15.6
7	45	30.6
8	35	23.8
9	21	14.3
10	7	4.8
Total	147	100%

Table 3 shows the respondents’ self-perceived information, communication, and technology (ICT) skills, which were measured using an interval scale between 1 (*very poor*) and 10 (*excellent*). Scale 7 has the highest number of respondents (45 respondents, 30.6%), followed by scale 8 (35 respondents, 23.8%). Both groups of respondents fall under students with *above-average* ICT skills. Scale 3 was recorded by the lowest number of respondents (1 respondent, 7%), followed by scale 4 (3 respondents, 2.0%). Both groups of respondents fall under the category of those with *below-average* ICT skills.

3.3 Research Question 2

The second research question queried the students’ opinion on the important elements for the development of an SAT. The analysis measured three main elements: (1) necessary oral presentation skills for SAT, (2) concepts for SAT, and (3) learning strategies for SAT.

Table 5. Respondents’ perception of needed oral presentation skills for SAT

Code	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
OPS1	Profiling the audience	4.65	1.031
OPS2	Defining the purpose of presentation	4.93	1.018
OPS3	Structuring the presentation	4.89	1.001
OPS4	Retaining audience interest	4.99	1.082
OPS5	Anticipating questions from the audience	4.63	1.068
OPS6	Developing thesis statement	4.75	1.084
OPS7	Developing topic sentences	4.82	1.058
OPS8	Explaining supporting details	4.86	1.102

OPS9	Developing and organising ideas	4.90	1.094
OPS10	Developing coherent and cohesive sentences	4.77	1.086
OPS11	Ensuring correct language mechanics (grammar, punctuation)	4.85	1.113
	Overall	4.82	1.067

The means and standard deviations of oral presentation skills deemed necessary by the respondents for an SAT are presented in Table 5. They viewed these skills as equally important. IMP4 (retaining audience interest) attained the highest mean of 4.99 (SD = 1.082) followed by IMP2 (defining the purpose of presentation) with a mean value of 4.93 (SD = 1.018). Item IMP9 (developing and organising ideas) obtained a mean value of 4.90 (SD = 1.094). IMP8 (explaining supporting details) and IMP11 (ensuring correct language mechanics) reported almost equal mean values of 4.86 and 4.85, respectively. The item that received the lowest mean was item IMP5 (anticipating questions from the audience) with a mean value of 4.63.

Table 6. Respondents' perception of necessary concepts for SAT

Code	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
CON1	In line with the syllabus of the course	3.37	0.511
CON2	Specifically designed for self-directed learning	3.30	0.554
CON3	To be used during class session of the course	3.33	0.515
CON4	To be used during student learning time (SLT)	3.38	0.528
CON5	To be used as a compulsory module for the course	3.22	0.617
	Overall	3.32	0.545

Table 6 displays the means and standard deviations for the concept viewed as necessary by the respondents for an SAT. Item CON4 (to be used during student learning time) attained the highest mean score (mean = 3.38, SD = 0.528) followed closely by item CON1 (in line with the syllabus of the course) with a mean score of 3.37 (SD = 0.511). Item CON3 (to be used during class sessions of the course) recorded a mean score of 3.33 (SD = 0.515). The mean score for CON2 (specifically designed for self-directed learning) was 3.30 (SD 0.554). Finally, the lowest mean was attained for item CON5 (to be used as a compulsory module for the course) with a score of 3.22 (SD = 0.545).

Table 7. Respondents' perception of necessary learning strategies for SAT

Code	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
LS1	Scaffolding	3.22	0.465
LS2	Questioning	3.31	0.480
LS3	Self-learning	3.25	0.534
LS4	Discussion and giving feedback	3.37	0.552
LS5	Step-by-step tutorials	3.46	0.526
	Overall	3.32	0.511

Table 7 presents the descriptive results of the learning strategies the respondents deemed necessary for an SAT. Item LS5 (step-by-step tutorials) recorded the highest mean score (3.46, SD=0.526), followed by item LS4 (discussion and giving feedback) (mean = 3.37, SD=0.552). Next, item LS2 (questioning) received a mean score of 3.31 (SD=0.534) while item LS3 (self-learning) recorded a mean score of 3.25 (SD=0.534). Item LS1 (scaffolding) obtained the lowest mean score of 3.22 (SD=0.465).

3.4 Research Question 3

The third research question sought to identify if there is a significant difference in the mean scores of needed oral presentation skills, and the concepts and learning strategies for a Speech Assistant Tool (SAT) between male and female students.

Table 8. The means of the factors based on gender

Factor	Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation
Oral Presentation Skills (OPS)	Male	4.82	0.892
	Female	4.82	0.984
Concepts (CON)	Male	3.27	0.453
	Female	3.35	0.467
Learning Strategies (LS)	Male	3.30	0.403
	Female	3.33	0.390

Table 8 shows that there are no mean differences in the necessary oral presentation skills for SAT based on gender. The male students (M = 4.82, SD = 0.82) indicated equal perception towards the important oral presentation skills for SAT as female students (M = 4.82, SD = 0.984). The mean difference for concepts for SAT between males (M = 3.27, SD = 0.453) and females (M = 3.35, SD = 0.467) was also minimal. The perceptions towards learning strategies for SAT between males (M = 3.30, SD = 0.403) and females (M = 3.33, SD = 0.390) were almost similar in value.

Table 9. Independent samples result

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				
		F	Sig	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Oral Presentation Skills	Equal variances assumed	1.167	0.282	0.016	145	0.987
	Equal variances not assumed			0.017	122.688	0.987
Concept	Equal variances assumed	1.792	0.183	0.982	145	0.328

	Equal variances not assumed			0.990	116.475	0.324
Learning Strategies	Equal variances assumed	0.121	0.729	0.349	145	0.727
	Equal variances not assumed			0.346	110.776	0.730

The independent sample results (Table 9) show that equal variances were assumed for all three components. This is because the significance value for the Levene's test for equality of variance is above 0.05. No significant difference was noted in the mean score ($p > 0.05$) between male and female for the needed oral presentation skills in developing the SAT. There was also no significance difference ($p > 0.05$) reported between male and female for the concepts needed in the development of SAT ($p > 0.05$). The findings (Table 9) also indicate no significant difference ($p > 0.05$) in learning strategies between male and female.

4. Conclusion

The main goal of the current study was designed to investigate the needs of students in the development of the Speech Assistant Tool (SAT). In doing so, this study sought to answer three research questions. The first research question aims to gauge the students' perceptions of their language proficiency and ICT skills. The second research question intends to examine the students' perceptions of the needed oral presentation skills, concepts, and learning strategies for the Speech Assistant Tool (SAT). Finally, the third research question determines if there is a significant difference in the mean scores of the needed oral presentation skills, and the concepts and learning strategies for the Speech Assistant Tool (SAT) between male and female students.

For the first research question, the respondents' self-perceived language proficiency was measured using their Malaysian University English Test (MUET) results. The results show that 122 (83.0%) students (the majority) demonstrated an "independent" level of language proficiency. The respondents were also asked to estimate their ICT skills. A majority of the respondents revealed that they had above-average ICT skills. The students perceived themselves to have adequate skills to maneuver the SAT, which is crucial for the development of their oral presentation skills.

The second research question investigates the students' perceptions of the needed oral presentation skills, as well as the concepts and learning strategies for Speech Assistant Tool (SAT). They found that the most important skill for oral presentation is retaining audience's interest. This finding aligns with Grieve, Hunt, and McKay (2021), who highlight the fear of public speaking among university students stems from the fear of being judged by the audience. In the current study, the respondents find that the most important concept of SAT is that it should be used during student learning time. This is in accordance with numerous evidence on students' preference for flipped classrooms (Hew & Lo, 2018). Step-by-step tutorials were

reported to be the most essential for the development of an SAT, thus corresponding to Lin and Wang's (2022) who proposed the usefulness of a step-by-step tutorial in guiding students to be proficient with the target skill and the system.

The research question sought if there is a significant difference in the mean scores of needed oral presentation skills, and the concepts and learning strategies for a Speech Assistant Tool (SAT) between male and female students. The finding indicates no significant difference in needed presentation skills, and the concepts and learning strategies for an SAT between male and female students. Although gender differences is a variable that influences students' performance (Zali, Razlan, Baniamin & Setia, 2022), the respondents' opinions are similar as they possess the same needs for SAT.

This study has a few limitations, the first of which is the sample size. Although the size is viewed as adequate, it is recommended that future studies expand the sample size because a high-quality needs analysis requires an extensive sample size to truly understand the respondents' needs. The second limitation is the instrument. Although the questionnaire was adapted and had attained sufficient Cronbach's alpha values, the instrument did not undergo experts' validation. It is suggested that the instrument used in future studies undergo validation by experts before being utilised in other settings. Also, future research may compare students' perceptions of computer-assisted language learning tools from different programmes, such as business, social science, and sciences as this would shed more insights into the students' needs.

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