

STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE IN DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS IN ACADEMIC PRESENTATION COURSE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how the Academic Presentation Course supports EFL students in developing their speaking skills through both linguistic and non-verbal aspects. Using a narrative inquiry approach with three participants, the research explored their experiences before, during, and after the course. The findings show that students initially struggled with anxiety, fast speech, and reliance on memorized scripts. However, through guided preparation, rehearsal, and feedback, they improved in fluency, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension, while also enhancing eye contact, gesture, and intonation. Ultimately, the course fostered both technical competence and confidence, shaping them into adaptable, audience-oriented communicators.

Keywords: Students' Experience, Academic Presentation Course, Speaking Skills, Public Speaking, Narrative Inquiry, EFL

A. Introduction

Speaking proficiency is considered one of the most crucial skills in learning a second or foreign language, yet it remains one of the most challenging to master. As Pawlak (2018) notes, spoken English is increasingly equated with overall language competence, particularly in today's globalized world, where communication across borders depends heavily on oral proficiency. Learners commonly pursue English not only for academic purposes but also to strengthen their

ability to interact in professional and intercultural contexts. Among the four language skills—listening, reading, writing, and speaking—speaking is regarded as the most demanding since it requires simultaneous mastery of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and interactional strategies (Dincer & Yesilyurt, 2017). Without the ability to communicate orally, language learning is reduced to passive knowledge of rules and symbols, depriving learners of its communicative essence (Virawan et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, English is positioned as a foreign language, and students frequently experience barriers in acquiring speaking competence. Wahyuningsih and Afandi (2020) identified several difficulties faced by students in English language education programs, including limited vocabulary, weak grammar mastery, pronunciation problems, and low self-confidence. Kehing and Yunus (2021) also highlighted that speaking is particularly challenging compared to other skills, as it requires both linguistic accuracy and real-time interaction. Wael et al. (2018) further emphasized that speaking is inherently a productive skill that involves collaboration between speakers and audiences, which often creates additional pressure for learners. These challenges illustrate the importance of designing instructional interventions that can provide learners with authentic and structured opportunities to practice speaking. Academic speaking, as distinct from everyday communication, demands a higher level of organization, vocabulary mastery, and confidence. Xi et al. (2021) define English academic

speaking as the ability to communicate effectively within academic contexts, encompassing a range of competencies such as content organization, discourse management, and interactive skills aligned with academic standards. Unlike casual conversation, academic speaking requires careful planning, persuasive delivery, and the ability to engage audiences in a structured manner. Anggini (2021) adds that academic speaking emphasizes not only language use but also the design, formality, and execution of presentations. Olha (2023) similarly observes that successful academic speaking requires vocabulary mastery, critical thinking, and the ability to present information coherently. Brooks and Wilson (2014) argue that mastering academic speaking can build self-confidence, sharpen critical thinking skills, and enhance professional readiness, making it an essential component of higher education. Previous studies confirm that classroom presentations contribute significantly to speaking development. For instance, structured presentations have been shown to enhance oral proficiency and vocabulary growth (Toghroli & Afraz,

2021; Zannrni, 2022) and improve rhetorical and communicative abilities when integrated with active learning methods (Bylkova et al., 2021). Similarly, participation in public speaking clubs has been found to foster confidence, reduce anxiety, and improve critical thinking (Pravitasari & Paripurna, 2024). However, most of these studies are product-oriented, focusing on measurable outcomes or strategies, while overlooking the lived experiences of students as they navigate preparation, rehearsal, and performance stages. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates students' personal experiences in the Academic Presentation Course at Universitas Tanjungpura using a narrative inquiry approach. Two questions asked in the research are:

1. What experiences did the students encounter before and during their participation in the academic presentation course?
2. How did the students' experiences after completing the academic presentation course influence their speaking skills?

By using narrative inquiry, it explores how the course influences their confidence, fluency,

articulation, and audience engagement, and what challenges they encounter in the process. By highlighting students' voices, this research aims to provide deeper insights into their developmental journey and offer implications for designing more effective, human-centered academic speaking instruction.

B. Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design using narrative inquiry to capture students' experiences in developing their speaking skills through the Academic Presentation Course. Narrative inquiry was chosen as it allows participants to reconstruct their learning journeys into coherent stories, revealing personal and emotional dimensions of their development before, during, and after the course.

Participants

The study involved three undergraduate students from the English Language Education Department at Universitas Tanjungpura, all of whom had completed the Speaking for Academic Presentation course in their third semester. The participants were selected through purposive sampling

based on specific criteria: achieving a GPA above 3.5, receiving an A grade in the course, demonstrating strong presentation performance, and having experience in public speaking. For confidentiality, pseudonyms were used.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately one hour. The interviews followed a chronological narrative structure: pre-course experiences (students' initial speaking skills and motivations), during-course experiences (preparation strategies, rehearsal practices, and lecturer feedback), and post-course reflections (perceived changes in speaking ability, confidence, and overall performance). An interview guide with open-ended questions was developed to ensure focus while allowing flexibility for participants to share their stories in detail. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, audio-recorded with consent, and later transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved familiarization with the data,

generating initial codes, searching for patterns, refining and defining themes, and constructing narratives through a process of restorying. The analysis highlighted themes related to speaking anxiety, preparation strategies, confidence-building, and skill transformation, providing insight into how the course shaped students' academic speaking development.

Data is described by restorying, coding, and interpreting the code.

C.Findings and Discussion

The findings have been organized into a narrative in chronological order and thematic analysis using data collected through interviews with participants. Six themes develop along with a variety of sub-themes that encompass the participants' experiences. The table below provides a quick overview of the narrative discussions emphasized for each theme.

Table 1. Sample of Tables

Themes	Sub-Themes
Expectation and Motivation toward the Course	a. Expectation before join the course b. Motivation for joining the course
Students' Initial Limitations	a. Students' prior knowledge about public speaking b. Students' public speaking experience
During the Preparation, Rehearsal, and Speech Delivery Phase	a. Students' fear in public speaking b. Finding out way on how to do academic presentation c. Learning experiences in class and self-learning d. Feedback and making strategy
Discovering Strategy for Public Speaking	a. Script making strategy b. Public speaking strategy c. Peer review
Noticeable Changes in Public Speaking	a. Mindset shifting b. Verbal and Non-verbal improvement

Pre-Experience

Three participants entered the Academic Presentation Course with strong motivation and clear expectations for self-development. Arka viewed the course as an opportunity to enhance his speaking ability and deliver presentations in a persuasive, TED Talk-like manner. Bella's motivation stemmed from her academic and professional aspirations, as she aimed to become a competent presenter for her future career as a researcher and educator. Similarly, Cinta expressed a determination to overcome her weaknesses and gain confidence in public speaking. Despite these different personal goals, their shared

motivation highlights the course's role as a platform for growth and improvement.

At the same time, the participants began the course with diverse limitations that reflected their varying levels of preparedness. Arka struggled with articulation and pacing, often speaking too quickly, while Bella encountered difficulties in structuring her ideas formally and managing anxiety about grammatical accuracy and pronunciation. Cinta, in contrast, faced more fundamental challenges, including frequent errors in pronunciation and grammar, as well as reliance on AI-generated scripts that she memorized without full comprehension. Together, these findings suggest that while motivation was a common strength, the participants' different starting points underscored the importance of the course in addressing both linguistic competence and psychological barriers such as anxiety and confidence.

During-Experience

The experiences of 3 participants during the preparation, rehearsal, and delivery phases illustrate the course as a structured yet personal journey of transformation. In

preparation, all three relied on lecturer guidance but with distinct orientations: Participant A engaged deeply with conceptual frameworks such as ethos, pathos, and logos; Participant B valued systematic scaffolding in structuring and refining her presentation; and Participant C benefited most from supplementary resources like videos and slides that built her confidence. These differences highlight that while instructional support was essential for all, each participant adapted it to suit their individual learning needs.

Rehearsal and delivery further underscored the diversity of their strategies. Participant A preferred solitary practice with feedback to refine articulation and non-verbal aspects, Participant B integrated time management and even AI tools alongside peer input, and Participant C combined group rehearsals with personal strategies such as handwriting scripts and simulating audience conditions. By the time of delivery, all three showed progress in confidence and performance, though at different levels of transformation. Taken together, their experiences demonstrate that the Academic Presentation Course not only

equipped students with technical presentation skills but also fostered self-reflection, creativity, and personal growth, enabling them to reshape their speaker identities in ways meaningful to their individual journeys.

Post-Experience

All three participants reported greater confidence, reduced dependence on memorized scripts, and a stronger emphasis on understanding and conveying content clearly. This collective shift from text-dependent delivery to flexible, audience-oriented communication highlights the course's effectiveness in equipping students with both linguistic and non-verbal competence, while also fostering moments of pride through external recognition from peers, lecturers, and wider audiences.

Within these shared outcomes, however, differences emerged that reflect each participant's personal growth trajectory. Participant A emphasized audience connection, learning to adjust pacing and simplify his language to ensure clarity. Participant B highlighted her emotional transformation, moving from anxiety to a relaxed enjoyment of presenting in front of large groups. Meanwhile, Participant C's progress

was marked by systematic preparation and resilience, culminating in her success at a large-scale presentation that reinforced her confidence. Together, these experiences demonstrate that while the Academic Presentation Course provided a common framework for skill development, it also allowed students to shape their growth in ways that matched their individual needs, identities, and aspirations as speakers.

E. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the Academic Presentation Course played a crucial role in fostering students' speaking development by strengthening both linguistic and non-verbal aspects of communication. The course supported progress across Brown's (2003) five dimensions of speaking—fluency, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension—while also improving eye contact, gestures, posture, and intonation. A key transformation was the shift from self-centered delivery to audience-oriented communication, which enabled students to achieve greater clarity, engagement, and confidence not only in academic presentations but also in

organizational and professional settings.

At the same time, students entered the course with diverse challenges, including anxiety, low confidence, reliance on memorization, and limited awareness of academic presentation norms. These obstacles were addressed through structured preparation, guided rehearsal, and constructive feedback, complemented by individual strategies such as systematic time management, use of digital tools, and peer collaboration. Through this process, students gradually moved toward extemporaneous delivery, developing adaptability, resilience, and a stronger sense of speaker identity. Taken together, the course demonstrated its value as more than technical training, serving also as a reflective and collaborative space that nurtured motivation, confidence, and communicative competence in diverse contexts.

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