Examining Female Students' Attitudes to English Oral Presentations. Do they Prefer to Speak Online or in Class?

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Abstract

Many learners of English as a second language find it difficult to speak in English. Delivering oral presentations in English is even more challenging. The goals of this study were to investigate: a) Saudi female university students' attitudes towards English oral presentations in general; b) whether they face difficulties when delivering presentations online or in class; and c) whether they prefer to give presentations online or in class. The study was conducted with 128 Saudi female university-level students. The data instruments were an eighteen-item questionnaire and semi-structured interviews which examined three constructs: (a) their attitudes towards English oral presentations in general; (b) their attitudes towards online English oral presentations; and (c) their attitudes towards in-class English oral presentations. The results showed that: (a) the students had positive attitudes towards the importance of English oral presentations for the improvement of their language, even though such presentations make them nervous; (b) the students were less nervous while giving online presentations than they were while giving in-class presentations; (c) the students preferred online presentations to in-class presentations; and (d) the students preferred to deliver online presentations alone and in-class presentations as a part of a group.

1. INTRODUCTION

Oral communication conveys information and ideas from one person to another (Alshammari & Mugaddam, 2023). In the educational setting, oral communication involves a number of activities such as group conversations, interviews and oral presentations (ibid). However, for higher education and future jobs, the ability to deliver oral presentations in English is one of the most important and commonly acquired skills (Ho, Nguyen, Dang, & Nguyen, 2023; Waluyo & Rofiah, 2021). An oral presentation involves talking to an audience on a specific topic planned and researched by a speaker. It can be done online or in person (Al-Nouh, Abdul-Kareem, & Taqi, 2015; Alshammari & Mugaddam, 2023). An oral presentation can be delivered either as part of a group or individually (Mohamad, 2024) and is deemed challenging in terms of mental processes and communication (Morita, 2000; Sodiqova, 2023; Mahmoud, et al, 2024).

This study aimed to address the following questions:
a. What are Saudi university students' attitudes towards English oral presentations in general?
b. What are Saudi university students' attitudes towards online English oral presentations?
c. What are Saudi university students' attitudes towards in-class English oral presentations?
d. Do students prefer online vs. in-class English oral presentations?

Lightbrown and Spada (2021) stated that in effective language learning, attitude is an essential factor. Investigating English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university students' perceptions of English oral presentations and whether they face difficulties when delivering them in class or online can increase our understanding of teaching English as a second language (L2). If Saudi female university students find it difficult to deliver oral presentations in either form, it suggests that we need to pay greater attention to teaching the preparation of English oral presentations at Saudi Arabian universities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Whether in group settings or one-to-one interactions, oral communication involves speaking in a clear, smooth and concise way that captures the audience's interest (Idrus, 2016). Oral presentations are a major component of language learning in the university (Ho et al., 2023) and are an important way to improve spoken communication skills (Živković, 2014). However, several studies have shown that students may be affected by a number of factors, not all of which are under their control.

A study by Al-Nouh, Abdul-Kareem, and Taqi (2015) examined the attitudes of 500 female Kuwaiti EFL college students (aged 17-20) towards the issues they face when delivering oral presentations. The data was collected using a questionnaire divided into three main constructs: personal traits, oral presentation skills, and instructor and audience. The results showed that the participants sometimes encountered some difficulties when delivering oral presentations. For instance, many of them felt anxious and worried each time they were due to deliver an oral presentation and became embarrassed during presentations even if they were well prepared. Moreover, more than fifty percent felt anxious when their instructors were present and others said they tried to avoid looking at their teachers. Moreover, nearly forty-two percent preferred to have written notes when giving their presentation, to protect them against memory lapses. When giving a presentation in front of other students, fifty-five percent experienced fear. More than sixty percent reported that they feared receiving unfair grades for their presentations. Some participants reported worrying about other issues, including keeping their presentation within the pre-set time limit, their poor mastery of grammar and vocabulary, and the lack of oral presentation courses.

Benraghda, Ali and Radzuan (2015) conducted a study on attitudes towards oral presentations. The participants were thirty university students at a university in Malaysia selected randomly from different departments and data was collected using a questionnaire. The results showed that forty percent of the students agreed that delivering oral presentations in English is vital. In response to a question about whether they would continue to deliver presentations after graduation, thirty-five percent agreed that they would. The same proportion also strongly agreed that they spent most of their free time with their friends engaged in activities related to delivering English presentations. Forty percent of participants claimed to enjoy presenting in English, but some were strongly against taking part in any activities that involved English oral presentations. However, nearly forty percent of the students claimed to have neutral feelings about the prospect of having to deliver a presentation in English in class.

Braun (2017) investigated the students' attitudes towards in-class and online presentations. Fifty-one male and female students participated in this study, thirty-three online presenters and eighteen in-class presenters. The presentations were delivered by self-selected teams of three students. The study used two instruments, one of which involved conducting a survey of students to ascertain their attitudes towards in-class and online presentations; the second instrument involved analysing the marks awarded for presentations and the impact of these (if any) on students' academic performance. Students were also asked about their anxiety levels when delivering presentations, about the extent of their familiarity with digital technology and

about how they perceived the different modes, but the study discovered no significant differences. Of the thirty-three students who had given online presentations, none chose to deliver a future presentation in class when they were offered a choice. Moreover, when it came to the in-class presenters, only thirty percent of them chose the online mode when they were asked to select a mode for a future presentation. The modes were found to be similar in terms of academic success.

Alghamdi (2021) conducted a study to find out the attitudes of fifty-nine students towards oral presentations in English. The participants, all of whom were foundation year students at a Saudi university, had to deliver a short presentation of two to three minutes in the classroom, in English, on subjects chosen by the researcher. Fear, anxiety and nervousness were reported by participants in response to this challenge. However, a number of participants stated that such presentations were valuable and helped them to learn new vocabulary and improve their pronunciation and presentation skills.

Lekawael, Reniwuryaan, and Bilmona (2023) investigated attitudes towards oral presentations in virtual learning by university-level students in Indonesia. The data was collected by means of a questionnaire and interviews. The participants were fifteen Indonesian students enrolled in an L2 acquisition class. The data showed that the majority had positive attitudes towards online oral presentations. In fact, eighty percent strongly agreed that online oral presentations are more fun and interesting than in-class presentations. On the other hand, seventy-three percent of them strongly agreed that having to deliver online reduced their anxiety levels and improved their self-confidence. The study found that overall, the students' motivation for virtual learning of English was improved by giving online oral presentations, compared to being asked to deliver oral presentations in class. Presenting in real-time in a classroom with an audience generated high levels of anxiety and fear. This included fear of the audience themselves and fear of having to engage in conversation with them, as well as fear of failure in itself. Seventy-three percent of the participants believed that delivering oral presentations in virtual learning reduced their level of fear. Most participants appeared to be at ease and eager to give their oral presentations. Eighty-seven percent agreed that oral presentations increased their motivation and enhanced their speaking ability which suggests that they benefited greatly from the activity. Approximately eighty-eight percent agreed that oral presentations in virtual learning helped them develop self-discipline and all of them agreed that they increased their self-confidence. Approximately seventy-three percent said that they found such presentations more entertaining.

Mohamad (2024) investigated the attitudes of 208 university students in Malaysia towards delivering English oral presentations and the factors influencing these attitudes. The study involved an investigation of (1) student attitudes to the importance of giving presentations in English; (2) the extent to which they prepared for delivering presentations in English; and (3) factors influencing their perspectives on having to give English presentations. The data was collected using an online questionnaire consisting of twenty items. Most participants in this study had positive attitudes to English oral presentations and their importance. However, the results showed that the participants needed to take more time to prepare their presentations well. Furthermore, the study emphasised the importance of instructors' encouragement, as well as the provision of correct information about the presentation topic. To alleviate student stress, the assistance of friends and instructors is essential in managing the responsibilities assigned. Furthermore, the study emphasised the need to allow students to choose whether to present alone or in groups. Allowing students to choose their teams helped reduce their levels of nervousness and discomfort, and increased their ability to perform at their best.

The research above reveals that EFL students typically experience a variety of challenges when delivering presentations, such as embarrassment, fear and anxiousness. However, to date, there has been no study on the challenges experienced by female Saudi Arabian freshmen in relation to delivering online versus in-class English oral presentations and this study aims to fill that gap.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted with 128 female Saudi university students with an average age of 19.3. All had begun learning English at the age of 10. Data was collected by means of an eighteen-item online attitudinal questionnaire, to gather information about Saudi female university students' attitudes towards: (a) English oral presentations in general; (b) online English oral presentations; and (c) in-class English oral presentations. The questionnaire, which was adapted from Ho et al. (2023), employed a five-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). This is the most widely used method for assessing public opinion on various topics (Robinson, 2024). As suggested by Galletta and Cross (2013), the study used semi-structured interviews, since these can enable mutuality between the participants and the interviewer.

Students were sent a link to the questionnaire, which was made available online using Google Forms. The link was sent to many more students than the 128 who ultimately completed the questionnaire. Prospective participants were informed of the study's objectives. The researcher explained that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and all participants gave their consent. Eight students were then chosen at random and agreed to take part in the semi-structured interviews. These were conducted in Arabic so that the participants would feel more comfortable. This also enabled them to express themselves clearly since their English proficiency was limited. The relevant quotes were then translated into English and are presented in the discussion section below.

4. RESULTS

This section reports the results of the questionnaire. First, the descriptive statistics are presented in three tables that report the results of each of the three constructs: (a) English oral presentations in general; (b) online English oral presentations; and (c) in-class English oral presentations. Responses to the statements in constructs b and c are then compared statistically, using Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks tests, since the data was not normally distributed based on the Shapiro-Wilk test ($P < .05$).

Table 1. General attitudes towards English oral presentations

No:	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
1.	I enjoy delivering English oral presentations.	20/128 16%	43/128 34%	16/128 13%	15/128 12%	34/128 27%	3	1.46
2.	Delivering English oral presentations makes me nervous.	2/128 2%	19/128 15%	10/128 8%	31/128 24%	66/128 52%	1.9	1.15
3.	Delivering English oral presentations improves my English-speaking skills.	11/128 9%	17/128 13%	6/128 5%	38/128 30%	56/128 44%	3.9	1.33
4.	Delivering English oral presentations enhances my confidence in speaking English.	27/128 21%	50/128 39%	6/128 5%	11/128 9%	34/128 27%	2.8	1.53

Few of the participants agreed that they enjoyed delivering oral presentations. The vast majority claimed to experience nervousness when delivering an oral presentation even though they agreed that such presentations improve their English-speaking skills. Most of them rejected the idea that oral presentations boost their confidence in speaking English.

Table 2. Attitudes towards online English oral presentations

No:	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
5.	I rehearse many times for my online English oral presentations.	22/128 17%	26/128 20%	14/128 11%	38/128 30%	28/128 22%	3.2	1.42
6.	I feel embarrassed when I make errors during my online English oral presentations.	6/128 5%	41/128 32%	14/128 11%	34/128 27%	33/128 26%	2.6	1.29
7.	I would rather give English oral presentations online than in front of a class.	11/128 9%	25/128 20%	9/128 7%	55/128 43%	28/128 22%	3.5	1.26
8.	I would rather give an online oral presentation alone than as part of a group.	9/128 7%	22/128 17%	7/128 5%	50/128 39%	40/128 31%	3.7	1.26
9.	During online English oral presentations, I struggle to speak fluently.	10/128 8%	34/128 27%	16/128 13%	50/128 39%	18/128 14%	2.8	1.21
10.	I prefer online English oral presentation over in-class English oral presentations.	4/128 3%	22/128 17%	26/128 20%	48/128 38%	28/128 22%	3.6	1.10
11.	I feel nervous when the audience asks me questions after online presentations.	12/128 9%	30/128 23%	13/128 10%	54/128 42%	19/128 15%	2.7	1.24

Almost overwhelmingly, participants agreed that they rehearsed multiple times for their online oral presentations. Most of them preferred to give oral presentations online rather than in class and slightly more than half also said they felt embarrassed about their errors when presenting in class. Seventy percent claimed to prefer to give their online oral presentations alone rather than as part of a group. More than half said they struggled to speak English fluently and that they felt nervous about being asked questions after online presentations.

Table 3. Attitudes towards in-class English oral presentations

No:	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
12.	I rehearse many times for my in-class English oral presentations.	5/128 4%	13/128 10%	14/128 11%	67/128 52%	29/128 23%	3.8	1.03
13.	I feel embarrassed when I make errors during my in-class English oral presentations.	10/128 8%	23/128 18%	15/128 12%	57/128 45%	23/128 18%	3.5	1.20

14. I would rather give in-class oral presentations than online English oral presentations.	16/128 13%	53/128 41%	12/128 9%	33/128 26%	14128 11%	3	1.31
15. I would rather give an in-class oral presentation alone than as part of a group.	22/128 17%	52/128 41%	11/128 9%	25/128 20%	18/128 14%	2.8	1.25
16. During in-class English oral presentations, I struggle to speak fluently.	14/128 11%	12/128 9%	17/128 13%	59/128 46%	26/128 20%	2.4	1.22
17. I prefer in-class English oral presentation to online English oral presentations.	23/128 18%	66/128 52%	21/128 16%	9/128 7%	9/128 7%	2.3	1.07
18. I feel nervous when the audience asks me questions after in-class English oral presentations.	6/128 5%	35/128 27%	18/128 14%	50/128 39%	19/128 15%	2.7	1.16

Most participants agreed that they rehearse many times for in-class oral presentations. Few preferred in-class presentations to online oral presentations. More than sixty percent of them expressed embarrassment about their errors. The majority preferred to present as part of a group during an in-class oral presentation. However, most also agreed that in-class oral presentations made them nervous and that they struggled to speak English fluently. Slightly more than half (54%) agreed that being asked questions after in-class oral presentations makes them nervous.

Table 4. Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks results for online vs. in-class English oral presentations

Online	In-class	Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks results
5. I rehearse many times for my online English oral presentations.	12. I rehearse many times for my in-class English oral presentations.	$Z = -5.384$ $P < .001$
6. I feel embarrassed when I make errors during my online English oral presentations.	13. I feel embarrassed when I make errors during my in-class English oral presentations.	$Z = -.458$ $P = .647$
7. I would rather give English oral presentations online than in front of a class.	14. I would rather give in-class oral presentations than online English oral presentations.	$Z = -5.435$ $P < .001$
8. I would rather give an online oral presentation alone than as part of a group.	15. I would rather give an in-class oral presentation alone than as part of a group.	$Z = -6.417$ $P < .001$
9. During online English oral presentations, I struggle to speak fluently.	16. During in-class English oral presentations, I struggle to speak fluently.	$Z = -2.091$ $P = .037$
10. I prefer online English oral presentation over in-class English oral presentations.	17. I prefer in-class English oral presentation over online English oral presentations.	$Z = -6.936$ $P < .001$

11. I feel nervous when the audience asks me questions after online presentations.	18. I feel nervous when the audience asks me questions after in-class English oral presentations.	*Z = -.165* *P = .869*

Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks tests showed that there was a statistically significant difference (P < .05) in the frequency of rehearsal between online and in-class presentations, as the participants rehearse more for in-class presentations. There were no statistically significant differences in their feelings of either embarrassment or nervousness in regard to online versus in-class presentations. However, significant differences did emerge in participants' preference for delivering oral presentations online rather than in class. More participants agreed that they found it harder to speak fluent English during in-class presentations than when presenting online. During in-class presentations, participants preferred to be part of a group rather than presenting alone.

5. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the questionnaire results reported in the previous section in conjunction with a number of quotes from the semi-structured interviews. This section is organised to discuss each of the three constructs in turn: (a) English oral presentations in general; (b) online English oral presentations; and (c) in-class English oral presentations.

With regard to the first construct, only about half of the participants agreed that they enjoyed giving oral presentations in English. This supports the findings of other studies, including those of Al-Nouh et al. (2015), Alghamdi (2021) and Lekawael et al. (2023). However, the statement is general and does not specify whether students' dislike is of online or in-class presentations in particular. About three quarters of the participants agreed that oral presentations make them nervous (statement two), as well as that they improve their English-speaking skills (statement three). Only about forty percent of the participants felt that oral presentations make them more confident (statement four). These results generally support Al-Nouh et al. (2015), Alghamdi (2021), Benraghda et al. (2015), Mohamad (2024) and Lekawael et al. (2023). They show that although the participants believe that oral presentations make them nervous and do not improve their confidence, they are actually beneficial. These findings are supported by quotes translated from the semi-structured interviews.

'I do not enjoy delivering oral presentations.'

'How can I enjoy oral presentations with all the stress?'

'I feel nervous when I think that I have an oral presentation.'

'I am a confident person until I am about to deliver an oral presentation.'

Regarding the second construct, which is related to online English oral presentations, about half the participants agreed that they rehearsed many times before giving an online presentation (statement five) which supports Mohamad's (2024) results, although these refer to in-class and not online presentations. A similar proportion agreed that they felt embarrassed about making errors (statement six). This supports the work of researchers such as Al-Nouh et al. (2015) and Alghamdi (2021). However, these studies concerned only in-class oral presentations. About sixty-three percent of the participants agreed with statements seven and ten, which concerned students' preferences for delivering in-class rather than online. This is in line with the findings of researchers like Braun (2017) and Lekawael et al. (2023). Seventy percent of the participants agreed with statement eight that they prefer to give an online presentation by themselves, a finding that supports the results of Mohamad (2024). Around fifty-three percent of the participants agreed that they struggle to speak English fluently when giving an oral presentation (statement nine). Approximately fifty-seven percent of the participants agreed that they feel

nervous about being asked questions at the end of their oral presentations (statement eleven). These results (from participants' responses to statements nine and eleven) are compatible with the findings of other studies that addressed in-class oral presentations, such as Al-Nouh et al. (2015) and Alghamdi (2021). These findings were supported by data from the semi-structured interviews, which included the following statements:

'I always prepare well for my online presentations because I do not want to make mistakes.'

'I feel less anxious when I know that my presentation is going to be online.'

'I cannot speak fast when I have an online presentation.'

'I do not like being asked after I finish my online presentation as I feel exhausted and nervous.'

With regard to the third construct, about attitudes towards in-class English oral presentations, seventy-five percent of participants agreed with that they rehearse multiple times for their in-class oral presentations (statement twelve) which is in line with Mohamad's (2024) findings. Sixty-three percent agreed that they feel embarrassed about in-class oral presentations (statement thirteen) which again supports researchers such as Al-Nouh et al. (2015) and Alghamdi (2021). Concerning statements fourteen and seventeen, up to seventy percent of the participants indicated that they preferred online to in-class oral presentations, which is compatible with what was found by Lekawael et al. (2023). In response to statement fifteen, around fifty-eight percent of the participants expressed a preference for giving in-class oral presentations as part of a group. Of the studies reviewed here, only Mohamad's (2024) addressed this issue, and her study was on online rather than in-class oral presentations. Sixty-six percent of the participants said that they struggle to speak English fluently when they deliver in-class oral presentations (statement sixteen), while slightly more than half agreed that they felt nervous when asked questions by the audience at in-class oral presentations (statement eighteen). This is in line with the findings of other studies, including Mohamad (2024) and Lekawael et al. (2023) and was confirmed in the responses from the semi-structured interviews:

'I feel nervous even when I rehearse endlessly before my in-class presentations.'

'I am anxious when my teacher tells me that my presentation is going to be in class.'

'My fluency to speak English is affected negatively when I stand in front of people.'

'I feel happy if I am not asked questions after I finish my in-class presentation.'

Statistical analyses were carried out between each pair of statements for constructs two and three which revealed significant differences ($P < .05$) between most pairs. In relation to statements five and twelve, the participants agreed that in-class oral presentations require more rehearsal than online oral presentations ($P < .05$). Thus, although they agreed that online oral presentations do require rehearsal, they also believed that in-class oral presentations require more. It can be suggested that the participants experience greater pressure when they have to present orally in class and this can be seen in terms of their attitudes towards other statements, as will be seen below. For statements six and thirteen, which were related to feeling embarrassed if they make errors, no significant differences were found at the $P > .05$ level, which suggests that students are equally concerned about making mistakes regardless of the mode of presentation. Concerning the paired statements seven and fourteen and ten and seventeen, which were about preferring in-class oral presentations to online oral presentations, the participants preferred online oral presentations (statistically significant at the level of $P <$

.05), which is compatible with the findings of other studies, including Braun (2017) and Lekawael et al. (2023). It can be assumed that this is mainly because of the anxiety and fear experienced by participants due to the physical presence of an audience. For statements eight and fifteen, which were related to the preference for giving in-class and online presentations alone or as a part of a group, the participants preferred to deliver online oral presentations alone, while they preferred to be part of a group during in-class presentations. This confirms that the main obstacle they face is the physical presence of an audience, and that by delivering a presentation as part of a group participants may feel that the attention of the audience is dispersed and not focused solely on them. In cases where a presentation does not go smoothly, participants may also feel that they do not have to take full responsibility. Concerning statements nine and sixteen, there was statistical significance ($P < .05$) in the participants' agreement that they find it more difficult to speak English fluently when their presentation takes place in class than when it is online. It should be pointed out that the participants reported that they struggle to speak English fluently in both modes of oral presentation, which could be the result of both nervousness and fear. For statements eleven and eighteen, which were related to being nervous about being asked questions after giving a presentation, regardless of the mode, no statistically significant differences were found ($P > .05$). Thus, although the audience is not physically present during online presentations, even virtual interaction with an audience made participants nervous.

'In-class presentations require more rehearsals and preparation than online presentations.'

'I do not like making errors regardless of the mode of the presentation.'

'I feel relieved when my teacher tells me that the mode of my presentation is online.'

'I do not know why my English becomes bad when I have people in front of me.'

'I feel really nervous to be asked [questions] during my presentation whether it was online or in class.'

It can be concluded that the participants in the present study would rather give a presentation online than in class. The study's main aim was not to promote either online or in-class presentations but rather to explore students' attitudes towards each form and identify which they prefer and why. However, since the physical presence of an audience is inevitable for students regardless of the advances in technology, it seems to be important to advise teachers to prepare their students to deal with the physical presence of an audience. It could be suggested that the advances in technology and communications may have made children and young adults less socially adept because they spend most of their time in a virtual world, and because of this it is even more important to provide students with opportunities to get used to presenting in front of physical audience, as this will improve their skills.

The study's limitations include the fact that it was conducted with just female students and that, due to time constraints, the number of participants was limited.

6. CONCLUSION

Speaking in front of people makes some people nervous and uncomfortable and delivering oral presentations in a second language is even more challenging. The present study sought to discover Saudi female students' attitudes towards online and in-class oral presentations in English and whether they preferred one form over the other. The findings showed that the participants believed that English oral presentations were useful for improving their L2 English, but they did not agree that they would especially enjoy giving oral presentations in class in English. In fact, they preferred online presentations due to the psychological burden

that accompanies dealing with the physical presence of other people. These findings suggest that teachers should consider providing their students with opportunities to practise presenting in front of physical audiences and use virtual presentations as a first step, which could help students become more confident and lead to the development of better communication skills. In turn, this could help them to acquire other useful generic skills, such as organizing their thoughts coherently, being able to control their inevitable anxiety and engaging effectively with their audience.

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