

Using reflection and self-analysis to develop university students' academic presentation skills

Satu Tuomainen

Language Centre, University of Eastern Finland, 70211 Kuopio, Finland

Email: satu.tuomainen@uef.fi

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Academic presentation skills are an essential part of university language and communication courses in Finland. Finnish students practice academic presentation skills in English in the Bachelor level and more scientific style in the Master level. As they enter Master studies, students have presentation experience and generally manage well, yet pre-presentation many are concerned about nerves, pronunciation and formality, and post-presentation many focus on possible errors. In this qualitative study, Finnish Master degree students (n=52) shared expectations about their upcoming English academic presentation as a video recording task, and following the presentation, self-analysed their performance in writing. The data on pre-presentation expectations and post-presentation self-analyses were analysed using content analysis. The pre-presentation videos indicated that while many students were concerned about the formality of the presentation language and content, and the pronunciation of more formal vocabulary, nervousness was the main concern. In the post-presentation self-analyses, many students were relieved to have managed well or better than expected, but many still highlighted their nervousness and errors in pronunciation. The results indicate that students require continuous support to develop oral English competence through reflection and analysis to adopt a more accepting attitude to minor errors in foreign language communication.

Key Words: tertiary level, academic presentation skills, communication confidence, self-analysis, academic English.

1. Introduction

Developing effective presentation skills is an integral part of higher education (HE) and becoming an academic expert (Murillo-Zamorano & Montanero, 2018; Tsang, 2018). However, academic presentation skills in tertiary education have not enjoyed the same level of research interest as other forms of academic communication, particularly writing skills. Yet it could be argued, as Walters and Walters (2002) have, that good presentation skills showcase research perhaps even more effectively than the written version. Therefore, it is crucial that university students develop academic and scientific presentation skills, and internationally especially in the context of English for Academic Purposes, in a variety of courses during studies. Essential to presentation development is also varied and detailed feedback provided by teachers and peers, and the student's own reflection and analysis. Reflection is a vital part of any academic work as it encourages students to process their strengths and weaknesses and the significance of preparation (Edwards & Nicoll, 2006).

Much of the limited research on presentation skills at tertiary level has recently focused on the use of videos, virtual reality and other ICT methods (Galindo et al., 2020; Hung & Huang, 2015; Murphy & Barry, 2016; Ritchie, 2016; Tailab & Marsh, 2020). Video recordings of classroom

presentations have been shown to support students' awareness of their skills. Further, the impact of teacher feedback and peer feedback has also received attention in presentation skill research, with the focus mainly on assessment (De Grez et al., 2012; Murillo-Zamorano & Montanero, 2017). Peer assessment has been viewed positively in some studies (Chen, 2010) while in others, students' self-assessment scores have been higher than the teacher's (De Grez et al., 2012). Teacher feedback on presentations has also previously been viewed most positively, while self-assessment with tests and rubrics has been considered less valuable by the students (van Ginkel et al., 2017).

In a systematic review of presentation research in the HE context (van Ginkel et al., 2015), the authors found that between 1992 and 2012, only four of the 52 publications had applied qualitative methods to study presentation skills. While a decade has passed, this result still indicates that, one, the amount of research in the field is very limited, and two, there is a significant underrepresentation of qualitative research. Hence, more research on the development of academic oral presentation skills is required, and there is a need to explore presentation skill development qualitatively from a student perspective.

In Finland, all HE degrees include language and communication requirements (Tuomainen, 2018), and the aim of these foreign language communication courses, most commonly in English, is to prepare students for field-specific, academic and professional situations (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2004). Academic presentation skills are typically practiced throughout these courses and by the time Finnish students enter their Master studies, they have had presentation experience individually, in pairs and in groups. As a result, they will typically manage well with advanced academic or scientific presentations in their Master degree English courses. Yet many students will feel apprehensive about the use of formal English and the overall experience of public speaking (Pörhölä et al., 2019).

In this study Finnish Master students ($n=52$) from four degree programs in two faculties, all using English as a foreign language, were asked to orally consider their expectations about their upcoming English academic presentation, and following the presentation, to self-analyse the performance in writing. In the video task students talked in English about their expectations for the upcoming presentation, their main strengths as a presenter and their main concerns about presenting more formally in English. After the presentation, students were asked to reflect in English on their preparation, performance, and provided peer feedback in a written self-analysis. The data collected from these tasks were used to answer the following research questions:

1. What expectations, strengths and concerns do Finnish Master students have towards preparing and delivering an academic oral presentation in English?
2. How do Finnish Master students view their preparation, performance and peer feedback in their self-analyses after the presentation?

1.1. Essentials of effective oral presentations

The key elements of effective oral presentations have been largely agreed upon in communication literature and research over the last two decades. In preparing a presentation, the presenter is encouraged to create content that relates to the audience and is structured clearly and logically (Davis et al., 2013; Walters & Walters, 2002). Good preparation and adequate time for practice are also essential in helping the presenter with any performance anxiety or nerves related to public speaking (Giba & Ribes, 2011).

A typical presentation structure is three-fold: introduction, body and conclusion (Hofmann, 2014). In the introduction the presenter should be dynamic and create a connection with the audience, and in more formal circumstances also present the outline of the presentation. The body of the presentation is the main part where the topic and arguments are explored in a clear organisation while also keeping the main points limited (Hatfield & Wise, 2015; Meredith, 2021). Ideally during a presentation, and particularly formal ones lasting longer than 10 minutes, the presenter

should also apply visual aids such as PowerPoint slides with text, images, animation and graphics to visually illustrate the content (Meredith, 2021).

Despite the importance of the content and structure in any oral presentation, Zanders and MacLeod (2018) have maintained that content is in fact the least impactful element with the audience. Instead, speaking with confidence and in a conversational tone creates the foundation for an effective presentation, also in an academic or scientific context. Therefore, an effective presentation should be spoken from select points and not read as a text as reading decreases audience contact, restricts body language and leads to a monotonous tone (Meredith, 2021; van Emden & Becker, 2016). Instead, the use of effective volume, intonation, variation, pace, pausing, body language, gesturing and eye contact all contribute towards effective delivery and a performance that will engage and convince the audience (Walters & Walters, 2002).

Delivery can also be assisted by the fact that presentation skills are transferrable (van Emden & Becker, 2016), so that presenting in one language creates experience and skills for another. However, it should be remembered that presenting academic content in a foreign language can be a challenge for many international students, even at Master level. Some university students may also suffer from social or general anxiety, but for many students, foreign language is the main concern (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). For non-native speakers of English at university level, performing in front of others has been the most stressful element of their communication courses (Tuomainen, 2017). This type of anxiety and stress can also affect short-term memory (Lapointe et al., 2012), which may result in heavy reliance on notes or reading, which, as previously discussed, are discouraged in presentations.

1.2. Feedback, reflection and self-analysis to support presentation skills development

To assist students in their personal and professional development of presentation skills, it is a necessity that they are provided peer and teacher feedback but also comprehensive tools to analyse their own expectations and reflect on their performances. As McGivney (2006, p. 17) has stated, “people often do not realise the extent of their learning until they are given the time and opportunity to think about what they actually do.” This notion of reflection also connects to Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory and how reflection bridges theoretical concepts and practical experiences.

Feedback is a crucial part of any learning process but as a complex process it can also have little or even negative effect (Molloy & Boud, 2013). Emotions have a strong influence on how students perceive feedback and external assessment on their presentation skills can be taken as judgment their person rather than the task (Molloy et al., 2013). Feedback on a performance can be intimidating as most individuals have a set view of themselves, and any challenge to this perception can create dissonance between the student’s internal and the teacher’s external perceptions (Hepplestone & Chikwa, 2014).

In addition to teacher feedback, peer feedback is another part of the development by providing students a peer perspective (Chen, 2010; De Grez et al., 2012; Murillo-Zamorano & Montanero, 2017). Recently, particularly computer-mediated peer feedback has provided good results on presentations for its convenience (Li et al., 2020). However, students may also feel their peers are too lenient in their comments (Patchan & Schunn, 2015) so they will seek more constructive feedback from the instructor (van Ginkel et al, 2017).

Yet any learning should also emphasise exploratory learning which can be implemented through individual reflection (Chang, 2019). Reflection can be seen as crucial in inciting more extended and in-depth analysis of skills and qualities and thus leading to a well-rounded learning experience (Picciano, 2017). Activities that encourage reflection such as self-analysis and constructive evaluation of one’s learning process have been seen to increase learner motivation, autonomy and satisfaction (Bourke, 2018; Cotterall, 2017; Mannion, 2021). Self-evaluation can also lessen the emotive impact of feedback and reduce the role of the official assessor, i.e. the teacher (Molloy

et al., 2013). However, self-assessment alone is considered inadequate for performance improvement (Molloy et al., 2013), and Bourke (2018) has insisted that self-assessments should not be used in student grading.

Self-assessment is not without its challenges, especially when assessing skills and competencies. In earlier studies highly performing students have been overly critical of their own skills while more poorly performing students have had “over-inflated self-perceptions of performance” (Molloy et al., 2013, p. 55). Further, males have tended to have more favourable self-assessment results due to confidence while for females success appears to be more related to luck or external forces (Ellis et al., 2008). Therefore, women can often rate themselves too severely while men’s assessment is more adjusted to their actual skills and abilities (Torres-Guijarro & Bengoechea, 2017).

1.3. The Finnish context

Finnish university students have expressed concerns about oral competency in academic English, including the accuracy of their language use and particularly pronunciation (Hynninen, 2016). Yet the teaching of English in Finnish primary and secondary schools and the generally positive attitudes towards English as the main foreign language have installed a firm foundation for academic English at university level. The favourable outlook on English has enabled most students to enter university with good competence, developed both in formal education and in various non-formal, informal and lifelong language learning environments (Tuomainen, 2018). Officially during their studies university students should have a B2 level of English on the Common European Framework of Languages (CEFR) (Saarinen & Nikula, 2013). The B2 level refers to an independent language user who can understand specialised texts and discussions, interact with fluency and write and communicate about a variety of topics (Council of Europe, 2022).

Most Master degree programs in Finnish universities use English comprehensively for courses and assignments (Mauranen & Mauko, 2019) so students become accustomed to academic English in their subject studies, particularly reading and listening. Lecturers teaching through English in Finland have, however, complained about students’ unwillingness to talk and present in English (Tuomainen, 2022). The manner in which Finnish university students approach presentations in English, the feedback process, and their attitude and aptitude towards reflection and self-analysis can also be influenced, positively or negatively, by the fact that Finnish university students are older than most of their European counterparts (Ursin, 2019).

2. Methods and materials

2.1. Participants

In the spring semester 2021, 119 Master degree students from faculties of health sciences and natural sciences in a mid-sized science university in Finland participated in an English course intended to develop scientific writing and presentation skills. 52 of the students (27 males and 25 females, aged 23-41) provided their consent to participate in this study. All 52 students were Finnish and spoke Finnish as their first language and English as an established foreign language with at least B2 level of proficiency. As Master programs in Finnish universities should be completed in two years, all students were either in the first or second year of their programs.

2.2. Study design

The English course was organised online in spring 2021 because of campus attendance restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The course utilised Zoom videoconferencing for live classes and presentations, and the Moodle online learning environment for synchronous and asynchronous tasks and assignments, including discussions, language-related tasks, a larger writing task and presentation preparation.

In week five of the eight-week course, students were asked to view a lecturer's pre-recorded video lecture and other online materials on preparing scientific presentations. Following this, students were asked to record a video in English, lasting approximately five minutes, where they would discuss their expectations of the upcoming presentation, their main strengths as a presenter and their main concerns about presenting more formally in English. The video was sent to the course lecturer via the Moodle learning environment, and the lecturer responded in writing to each video assignment to address the students' concerns, offer advice on any issues raised and provide encouragement for the upcoming presentation.

The presentations were held in week six of the course. Each student prepared a scientific presentation on a topic related to their current research interests, with suitable formality and use of references. During the course students had been provided various materials to assist them in the preparation, including a feedback form to be used by the lecturer, and other materials on language, delivery, nerves, reference use and signposting phrases. The presentations were held in two-hour sessions of maximum five students and the lecturer, to create a less stressful environment. Each presentation lasted 12-15 minutes and was followed by discussion and oral peer feedback. Students were encouraged to record their presentations for the self-analysis, but this was not mandatory, and only ten students of the 52 ended up recording their online performance.

Following the presentation session, students were asked to reflect in English on their preparation, performance and received peer feedback in a written self-analysis (approximately 400 words). The assignment was submitted to the lecturer through the Moodle learning environment, and the lecturer responded with the feedback form completed during the student's presentation. As part of the process of presentation skill development, it was considered essential that students first reflected on their own performance before seeing the teacher's feedback (cf. Hepplestone & Chikwa, 2014). Also, while the pre-presentation video and the post-presentation self-analysis were required tasks on the course, they were not part of the overall course grading.

2.3. Data collection and analysis

The study design, although involving human subjects, was given permission by the university ethics committee as the participants were adults. None would be identifiable in the text and explicit consent to participate in the study was given. The data collected from the 52 students who provided consent for their submissions to be utilised anonymously and only for this study were analysed using content analysis (Cohen et al., 2018).

The pre-presentation video submissions were transcribed verbatim and analysed as text data. The video submissions ranged from 2 minutes 40 seconds to 7 minutes 30 seconds and the subsequent transcription data ranged from 501 words to 752 words. The transcription data were analysed using a thematic framework to identify recurring patterns and develop meaningful themes. By carefully reviewing the data, an initial set of codes was identified, such as *enjoys presenting*, *calm*, *not many strengths*, *formality a concern*, *pronunciation* and *freezing* (i.e. forgetting what to say).

In the post-presentation self-analysis the texts ranged from 326 to 424 words. The text data were analysed using a thematic framework to identify recurring patterns and develop meaningful themes. By carefully examining the text data, an initial set of codes was identified, such as *went well*, *critical view*, *pronunciation errors*, *pleasantly surprised* and *still nervous*.

The data analysis was conducted in two separate phases for the two sets of data. The unit of analysis was conceptual themes consisting of one to several sentences. The codes and data were analysed, compared and contrasted to integrate different themes to illustrate the students' expectations and reflections. The initial set of codes was further compared, contrasted and patterns related to mentions of *pronunciation*, *slides*, *nerves*, *topic*, *formality* were merged, drawing on existing literature on presentations and presentation skills. To promote the validity and reliability of the study and results, an outside coder was invited to perform analysis on the data and after comparisons and discussions a consensus was reached (87 %).

3. Results

3.1. Students' expectations on the presentation

In the pre-presentation video task, students were requested to reflect on their previous presentation experiences to highlight their strengths as a presenter in English, their expectations regarding the upcoming presentation, and any concerns they had. The frequency of the mentions of either positive, negative, or neutral expectations regarding the upcoming presentation are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of codes regarding the upcoming presentation.

General categorisation and codes of expectations	f
Positive expectations	10
<i>Performance confidence</i> (giving presentations is fun, stronger presenter than writer, can handle nerves well)	
<i>Linguistic confidence</i> (not afraid to speak English, good at explaining issues in English, clear pronunciation)	
Negative expectations	28
<i>General performance anxiety</i> (nervous about any presentation, speaking too quickly because of nerves)	
<i>Language-related anxiety</i> (worrying about pronunciation or scientific vocabulary)	
<i>Lack of experience</i> (little use of oral English in daily life)	
Neutral expectations	14
<i>Importance of English in science and current studies</i> (need for English during current studies and future work)	
<i>Importance of practice for studies and work</i> (useful to practice presentation skills for other courses)	

3.1.1. Positive expectations: "Giving presentations is fun"

Students with a positive outlook on their upcoming presentation were a minority in the participants but their attitude towards the presentation process appeared enthusiastic. In addition to one student who expressed in her video that giving presentations was fun, others also highlighted that they felt comfortable giving presentations in English, were not afraid to express themselves in English or considered being "good" at explaining issues orally in English. The codes could be thus categorised into either performance confidence or linguistic confidence, as noted in Table 1.

As the course in question also included practice in scientific writing, some students viewed the upcoming presentation positively because they considered themselves stronger presenters than writers in English. Expectations such as these can again be linked to both performance confidence and linguistic confidence. An element of positive expectations for several students was also not feeling nervous about the presentation since they could "handle nerves well" or did not "stress about presenting". These expressions are noteworthy because of their strong contrast with students who had more negative expectations.

3.1.2. Negative expectations: "As a presenter I am terrible and doing a presentation is my worst nightmare"

In the transcribed video data, 28 of the 52 students expressed expectations that could be categorised as negative towards the upcoming presentation. Themes in this categorisation included being ill-prepared to speak English because of the lack of spoken English in daily life, feeling nervous about presenting in general and in English, worrying about the pronunciation of more formal vocabulary and being concerned about appropriate use of scientific vocabulary. As indicated in

Table 1, these codes can be categorised into general performance anxiety, language-related anxiety or feeling nervous because of a lack of previous presentation experience or little regular use of spoken English.

Most mentions of negativity related to nerves. Many students expressed strong emotions towards the presentation because of previous bad experiences and were expecting their nerves to negatively affect their performance. Students who felt nervous also mentioned they had insufficient practice of oral English, often comparing it to using more writing and listening with English. Another element connected to lack of experience was the use of more scientific vocabulary in the presentation. This was also connected to one of the main concerns in the expectations: pronunciation. Following nerves, worrying about incorrect pronunciation was the second most frequently mentioned item of negativity towards the presentation. While Finnish young adults generally have good English skills, including pronunciation (Rantala & Greenier, 2020), being critical of one's own and others' pronunciation of English is also common among Finns (Paakki, 2020).

3.1.3. Neutral expectations: "It is important to improve and maintain my skills continually"

14 video submissions of the 52 included expressions that could be categorised as a neutral attitude to the upcoming presentation. In these data students commented more generally on English use in a task such as a presentation, acknowledged the prominent role of English in various courses in their Master studies, and found the provided practice and feedback on presentation skills useful. Many students also highlighted the fact that they would require the use of scientific English in their future careers.

3.1.4. Students' pre-presentation strengths and concerns

In addition to asking students to consider their expectations for the presentation, in the pre-presentation video task, students were also asked to consider their strengths as a presenter, and to detail any specific concerns they had so the instructor could respond and potentially alleviate those concerns. Based on the students' own views and previous feedback received, the most frequently mentioned strengths were (number of mentions in parentheses):

- Being calm during the presentation (12)
- Speaking clearly and understandably (10)
- Having confidence (6)
- Good preparation (5)
- Having an outgoing character (2)
- Not being afraid of mistakes (1)

It should be noted that most strengths were mentioned by students who had either positive or neutral expectations about their presentation. In contrast, many students who had a negative outlook on their presentation, found it challenging to consider strengths, such as three students who said they did not have any strengths as a presenter.

For explicit concerns regarding the presentation, many students referred to their earlier mentioned expectations, such as being concerned about the formality of their language, being worried or overly worried about the pronunciation of scientific vocabulary and tending to memorise the presentation content word by word ("*which leads to it sounding tacky*"). Many of these elements can be related to foreign language use but also to general performance concerns such as memorising content extensively to avoid forgetting what to say (i.e. freezing) during the presentation.

3.2. Students' presentation self-analyses

Following their academic presentations, students were asked to analyse their own presentation preparation, performance, peer feedback and any other elements. The self-analyses were mostly based on recollections as only ten students had opted to record their online presentation. After

each presentation, other students provided oral feedback and detailed feedback from the course lecturer, filled on a specific feedback form, was provided after each student had submitted the self-analysis. The purpose of this order was to allow students to process their own preparation and performance without the bias of the lecturer feedback. Table 2 presents the themes, categories and codes found the self-analysis text data regarding the students' preparation, performance and the peer feedback.

Table 2. Themes, categories and codes in the students' post-presentation self-analyses.

Themes, categories and codes from the self-analyses	f
<i>Preparation</i>	
Quite similar to previous presentations	12
Quite different to previous presentations	14
Much better than previously	2
Much more work than previously	28
<i>Performance</i>	
Went well/moderately/fairly good/pretty good/quite well	15
Speech was calm and clear	30
Relevant content, easy to follow	6
Slides good, clear and easy to understand	6
Confident during the presentation	1
Nervous/very nervous during the presentation	31
Presenting in English much harder than in Finnish	4
Pronunciation issues	39
Should have worked more on the visuals	26
Should have practiced more	14
<i>Peer feedback received</i>	
Good pronunciation	32
Calm delivery	39
Easy to follow delivery and content	25
Clear slides	20
Interesting topic and well-structured	15
Presenter excited about the topic	3
Formal language use	17
Less text in slides suggested	31
More reference use in the slides suggested	29
Fluency should be increased	16
More attention to structure (introduction and conclusion)	14

3.2.1. Self-analyses of preparation

As can be seen in Table 2, many students in their post-presentation self-analyses reflected that the preparation process had been much more laborious and time-consuming compared to previous presentation preparations, either in Finnish or English. Particularly paying attention to formal English had taken more time, including checking and practicing pronunciation. Also deciding on the structure of the presentation had taken more time than previously, and some students acknowledged they should have spent more time on the preparation.

In contrast, other students felt their preparation had not altered significantly from previous presentations, in Finnish or English, although mentions of spending more time on finding references and

creating the PowerPoint slides were included. One main difference in the preparation, however, was the chance to choose the topic, while in their subject courses, presentation topics were often preassigned. Therefore, having a chance to select an interesting and relevant topic was viewed positively.

3.2.2. Self-analyses on performance

Most students had both negative and positive comments about their performance, as seen in Table 2. Mentions of being nervous were mixed with mentions of relative success: *“I think my presentation was pretty good. I think I did manage well even though I was nervous”*. Nervousness was a frequently mentioned theme in the self-analyses, as it had been in the pre-presentation expectations. Another issue that persisted from the expectations was pronunciation. While some students explicitly highlighted their pronunciation success (*“I rejoiced when I got positive comments about the pronunciation”*), many others still wrote that words were mispronounced and that worrying about pronunciation had increased nervousness. Presenting in a foreign language was also mentioned as a source of anxiety. Although the presentation sessions were small in numbers and students were often with familiar peers, the situation still created anxiety: *“The presentation moment was really stressful. I am normally quite comfortable talking with only 6 friends but somehow the language made the difference”*.

In the positive notions about the performances, calm and clear delivery was frequently mentioned but many students also lamented that they could have performed better, with expressions such as *“it was decent but ...”* and *“went well but ...”* More time on preparation and practice was seen as one remedy to increase fluency and reduce stress so that the presentation process and performance would have been more enjoyable.

The use of visual aids, although integral to informative academic presentations, was less frequently mentioned in the students' self-analyses. Students who were happy or even proud of their PowerPoint slides made a note of this, while others wrote their slides should have been clearer and were too full of information. Text-based slides with long sentences are somewhat common in foreign-language presentations as students tend to build the slides as their own notes.

3.2.3. Peer feedback

The received peer feedback was the final element all students were asked to reflect on in their self-analyses. In previous studies peer feedback has been found to be useful (Li et al., 2020; Murillo-Zamorano & Montanero, 2017) but at times also too lenient (van Ginkel et al, 2017; Patchan & Schunn, 2015). In these data there were no mentions of peer comments being too nice or too positive. A slight majority of the self-analysis mentions of peer feedback was positive with encouraging comments about the presenter's calm delivery, good pronunciation, easy to follow content, clear slides, interesting topic, formal language use and general positive enthusiasm. Calm delivery was the most frequently mentioned element in the peer feedback. Interestingly, the more critical peer feedback rarely concerned the presenter's delivery but instead less personal elements such as the slides including too much text and too few references.

4. Discussion

The Finnish Master students in this study provided a unique view into academic English presentation skills and how students at tertiary level approach and analyse their oral presentations. Although Finnish HE emphasises versatile and effective use of English particularly in Master and PhD studies (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2021), students' oral activity and performance still require attention. While students' overall language skills are mostly suited for academic and scientific English use, communicative confidence should be increased.

The concepts of *calm* and *nerves* were highlighted in this study. Pre-presentation, many students felt nervous about the upcoming presentation yet also mentioned that being calm during the presentation was a strength. Similarly, post-presentation many students lamented their

nervousness during the presentation but also had positive peer feedback on their calm delivery. Feeling nervous about presenting is common in most university settings but nerves can be heightened in this context by several factors. Preparing and delivering a formal presentation in English as a first-time experience can be unnerving, and performing in front of peers, although online and in smaller groups, can be stressful. This may have been influenced also by students' lesser face to face communication during COVID-19 restrictions (cf. Adnan & Anwar, 2020).

Good preparation and enough time to practice are crucial to the success of any oral presentation and will assist the presenter with performance anxiety or nerves (Giba & Ribes, 2011). It was encouraging in this study that many students understood the value of good preparation and practice. Clear content was also considered a strength by many students and highlighted as a success. Many peer feedback comments also lauded clear content, and in contrast offered suggestions if more attention should have been paid to the structure.

Although many students in this study were apprehensive about their presentation in English, ultimately most managed very well. All presentations were assessed numerically with 1 as the lowest score and 5 as the highest. Within the 52 participants, the average overall grade for the presentations was 3.57. Three students of the 52 had to redo their presentation as the first attempt was failed but most managed well. In fact, 24 students had grades of 4 or 5 for their presentation, including many who pre-presentation had been worried and post-presentation also felt they could have performed better. This can be seen to indicate a critical view towards performing in a foreign language, particularly for more formal purposes, and is in line with previous studies on Finnish students' English use (e.g. Tuomainen, 2017; Hynninen, 2016).

4.1. Implications for higher education

To encourage university students to gain more confidence for presenting, essential tools include increased practice, reflection and feedback, as indicated by this study. Positive expectations for the presentation were a minority which signals that even in the Master level when Finnish students' command of English is arguably proficient, more active modes of communication such as oral presentations can create discomfort. This can result from unpleasant experiences in the past or the overall lack of practice with spoken English. Students in this study were studying mainly with their Finnish peers so chances to communicate with foreign students appeared limited.

Nerves were a persistent component in these presentations, which indicates that language anxiety and general anxiety influence English oral communication competence with Finnish university students. Although attempts were made to create a less stressful presentation setting, nervousness still dominated many presentations, at least on an emotional level. This could be remedied by increasing practice for presentation skills, in both language and communication courses and the students' subject courses. Additionally, it is useful to emphasise that perfection is not required for good communicative competence and confidence. After all, no one is a native speaker of academic language (Mauranen & Jenkins, 2019).

Still, the role of the presentation language in this case cannot be underestimated. For Finnish university students, performing has previously been the most stressful element of their English communication courses (Tuomainen, 2017), and language anxiety was visible in both the expectation data and the post-presentation data. The 'nerve' factor was the students' main concern about their presentation, followed by their pronunciation of English. Being critical of one's own pronunciation of English, and at times that of others, is a common phenomenon in Finland (Hynninen, 2016; Paakki, 2020). Increasing pronunciation practice of advanced vocabulary could be beneficial with this issue but also reminding students of the global role of English as a language of science.

In the presentation process the lecturer's feedback was provided only after each student had submitted their written self-analysis. The purpose for this was to allow students to reflect on their own performance without the bias of the instructor's external view and assessment, especially

given the emotional turmoil of the presentation and the emotional impact of external assessment of skills and abilities (Molloy et al., 2013). This procedure could be adopted more widely in presentation feedback and assessment.

In fact, Molloy et al. (2013) have created macro and micro dimensions of providing feedback to students in what they call an emotionally sustainable manner, taking the student's emotive reactions to feedback into consideration. These dimensions include considerations for the feedback source, mode, location, timing, information flow, dynamics, content and improvement strategies. Hence in this process, the peer feedback was provided immediately post-performance, followed by the student's self-analysis and then the external assessment. This order was intended to promote reflection, learner motivation and autonomy (Cotterall, 2017). Further, as self-evaluation can lessen the emotive impact of feedback (Molloy et al., 2013), this order can support the student's emotional process and thus also support subsequent performances.

4.2. Limitations and future directions

As any qualitative study on individual views and perceptions, this study has limitations. The subjects of the study represent one population in a particular setting, i.e. Finnish Master students within the context developing oral presentation skills in a foreign language, English. Examining the topic with a more multicultural and plurilingual population would have arguably provided different results. Also, the fact that these students represented health sciences and natural sciences, i.e. fields in which the role of English is prominent, also contributed to these particular results.

Data such as these, however, also lend themselves to further study within communication and presentation proficiency. While content analysis was applied to these data, applying discourse analysis would provide a linguistic perspective. Further, the use of video recordings to assist the self-analysis of presentation skills has been studied previously (e.g., Ritchie, 2016; Tailab & Marsh, 2020). In this study students were provided the opportunity to record their presentations, but the majority declined. A further study on the role of the recording in the self-analysis would provide more details on the visual, internal and external processes within a presentation experience.

Further, while peer feedback is an effective method to support and develop presentation skills, it may be more effective if given in more detail, such as with the help of a form or online submission (cf. Li et al., 2020). In this study the oral peer feedback, provided immediately after the presentation, often focused on inanimate elements such as the PowerPoint slides or reference use and less critical attention was given to the delivery or the presenter. A more comprehensive approach to the peer feedback could be another element studied further.

Regarding their self-analysis, in previous studies male students have tended to demonstrate more confidence on their abilities than female students (Ellis et al., 2008; Torres-Guijarro & Bengochea, 2017). In this study, however, gender differences in expectations, strengths, concerns or the self-analyses were not discernible. Pre-presentation concerns were shared by most students, and the successes and shortcomings post-presentation were also similar. However, a more comprehensive view on the personal characteristics of students could be an aim for further exploration.

Finally, in this study the students' reactions to the teacher feedback were not studied but would warrant a new study process, especially in comparison to the student's own analysis and the peer feedback, as discrepancies between all three have been reported in the past (De Grez et al., 2012; van Ginkel et al., 2017). Therefore, how each student processes and either accepts or rejects the teacher's external assessment of an often emotional presentation process is a valuable topic for extended research.

5. Conclusion

Reflection and self-analysis are an essential part of developing academic communication skills as they enforce students to analyse their strengths and weaknesses and view how their preparation impacts their overall success. Other crucial elements of presentation skill development are detailed feedback from various sources, such as peer feedback and instructor assessment. Communicative competence in a foreign language in an academic context is a multifaceted set of skills that require constant and increasing attention, as seen in this study of Finnish Master students. Many Master programs globally require the use of English, particularly in science disciplines such as health sciences and natural sciences. Therefore, particularly students who worry about formal English use and may have had stressful or unpleasant presentation experiences in the past, should be supported with more courses and opportunities to practice in a safe environment. The same presentation assignment can be equally challenging for many students but in the end, all will manage, and most will emerge with a positive and meaningful learning experience.

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