Investigating Japanese Students' Attitudes Towards and Perceptions of English Presentations

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Abstract

Oral presentation skills are crucial for higher education students. In an increasingly globalized world, the ability to persuasively deliver an oral presentation in English is especially advantageous. However, Japanese university students have lower communication confidence than their other Asian counterparts (Samimy & Kobayashi, 2004). To cultivate communicative competence, oral presentations have been gradually incorporated into EFL classes, with an increasing number of relevant teaching materials and resources available (Yamada, 2021). Nevertheless, whether this trend has enabled students to sufficiently understand the skills required to be a good presenter is undetermined, as little research has been conducted on their attitudes toward and perceptions of such presentations. Thus, the present study aims to explore students' perceived abilities of presentation skills and their attitudes toward English presentations. Approximately 100 university EFL students in Japan were asked to complete an 18-item questionnaire adapted from a previous study (Yukishige et al., 2007). The collected data were factor-analyzed, and three factors were extracted: "Need for presentations," "Confidence in the performance stage," and "Confidence in the preparation stage." The analyses highlighted the participants' characteristics in terms of the extracted factors. Furthermore, the students' academic majors had a significant impact on some of these factors. The detailed results and their pedagogical implications are discussed with the hope of motivating and enhancing communication confidence through presentation instruction.

Keywords: English presentation, factor analysis, Japanese university students

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Introduction

Oral presentation skills are essential for both working professionals and university students. For professionals, these skills significantly help promote their career advancement (Kawano, 2023; Masaki et al., 2019; Miles, 2014). For university students, mastering presentation skills can create new opportunities, support academic success, and foster self-reflection (Mak, 2021; Nakano, 2018). In an increasingly globalized world, the ability to deliver presentations in English has become particularly desirable, enabling both professionals and students to achieve their goals in international business (Koike & Terauchi, 2010; Xu et al., 2021) and in science and technology (Kawano et al., 2024; Shimamura, 2021). In the business sector, the ability to effectively present in English is critical for succeeding in competitive job markets and achieving business success. In science and technology, strong presentation skills can enhance global recognition of Japanese research. Given this situation, developing presentation skills in English is crucial at the university level.

Owing to the importance of presentation skills in English, an increasing number of relevant teaching materials and resources are now available (Yamada, 2021), and much research on English presentations focuses on pedagogy, particularly instructional methods (e.g., Brooks & Wilson, 2015; Iwami, 2022; Miki, 2020). However, relatively few studies have explored Japanese students' perceptions of their presentation skills and their attitudes toward presenting in English. To address this gap, this study investigates Japanese university students' attitudes toward and perceptions of English presentations.

Literature Review

When addressing English presentations for Japanese students, the topic of speaking English is inseparable, perhaps even central to understanding their presentation experience. Thus, reviewing the literature on English speaking is essential for understanding Japanese students' attitudes toward and perceptions of English presentations.

Acquiring speaking skills is often regarded as essential and simultaneously one of the most challenging aspects for Japanese university students. According to a survey conducted by Benesse i-Career (2024) involving 800 Japanese university students, more than half of the respondents expressed a desire to improve their English-speaking skills, but felt that their progress had stagnated after entering university. In relation to English classes, one student commented in an interview that she had fewer opportunities to give presentations at university than in high school. Although a fully established theoretical framework for oral presentations is yet to be developed (De Grez et al., 2009), certain research areas offer valuable insights into communication-related issues surrounding English presentations for Japanese university students. Three key areas—communication confidence, willingness to communicate, and project-based learning—are reviewed in the following sections.

Communication Confidence

Communication confidence—or conversely, the absence of English-speaking anxiety—is a key factor that influences oral presentation skills. For instance, compared to their counterparts in other Asian countries, Japanese EFL university students tend to exhibit lower confidence in communication (Apple, 2011; Cutrone & Beh, 2024; Samimy & Kobayashi, 2004). Additionally, those students often struggle to express their opinions due to heightened anxiety (Anuardi et al., 2023; Maher & King, 2020). To mitigate English-speaking anxiety

and enhance communication confidence, Eliott and Vasquez (2021) recommended incorporating various oral communication activities. Similarly, Masutani (2021) suggested that instructors in Japanese contexts should focus on boosting students' confidence, reducing speaking pressure, and setting achievable realistic goals. These studies highlight that while Japanese university students often face challenges related to communication confidence, targeted interventions such as teacher support and practice through activities such as oral communication can play a significant role in helping them overcome these difficulties and build confidence.

Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

Willingness to communicate (WTC) is another important area of research on communication issues. MacIntyre (2007) defines WTC as "the probability of speaking when free to do so," (p. 564) emphasizing micro-level processes and situational factors that can promote or inhibit L2 communication. A substantial body of research has examined WTC and has highlighted its role in fostering students' active engagement in communication. In particular, tasks have been shown to play a significant role. For instance, Toyoda et al. (2021) investigated how task-based language learning influences the situational nature of WTC in Japanese students. Their findings revealed that well-designed situational L2 tasks positively affected students' communication skills. This suggests that instructors should carefully design tasks that are tailored to their students' needs and proficiency levels to foster WTC and promote active participation.

Oral presentation tasks are learner-centered, providing meaningful opportunities for communication (Gürbüz & Cabaroğlu, 2021). By incorporating oral presentation tasks aimed at maximizing WTC, teachers can foster greater student participation and deeper engagement in classroom communication.

Project-Based Learning (PBL)

Previous studies have demonstrated that project-based learning (PBL) enhances students' interdisciplinary competence (Brassler & Dettmers, 2017; Yamada, 2021). In line with this, oral presentations have been increasingly incorporated into PBL as a key component of English education. Early examples of this integration can be seen in graduation projects where students delivered presentations (Yukishige et al., 2007). However, oral presentations were not commonly used during this period, and the technological resources available for creating visual aids were limited. For instance, PowerPoint, which is now widely used in educational and professional contexts, was relatively rare and considered an innovative tool. Despite the early use of such tools, instructional materials and practical guidance for incorporating oral presentation tasks into English language curricula were still underdeveloped.

As technological tools have evolved, the application of PBL in Japanese EFL contexts has expanded (Kimura, 2024; Yamada, 2021), providing greater opportunities for students to develop both linguistic and non-linguistic skills. Nevertheless, challenges remain, particularly concerning how teachers can facilitate meaningful interactions and maximize student engagement in PBL activities. This issue was addressed by Kimura (2024), who introduced a project-based English program designed to cultivate not only the four traditional language skills—reading, listening, speaking, and writing—but also additional skills such as research, authoring, collaboration, and output. Through this program, students can collaborate with

their peers, use technological tools, and practice delivering oral presentations, collectively enhancing their practical communication skills. Existing literature suggests that as technological advancements continue, the integration of PBL in Japanese English classrooms will likely become more widespread. This is expected to provide students with increased opportunities to engage in learner-centered communication. Moreover, the learner-centered nature of PBL holds promise in addressing ongoing issues related to classroom engagement and communication confidence, both of which are crucial for improving students' overall speaking abilities and willingness to communicate in English.

This review focuses on communication-related issues crucial to understanding presentation education. Additionally, exploring the relationship between students' attitudes toward their studies and their academic backgrounds is important because variations in these factors can be highly influential.

Variation in Students' Attitudes and Academic Backgrounds

When learners are examined as a collective group, the observed phenomena often appear uniform. However, closer examination frequently reveals the underlying variations. These variations can be attributed to several factors, primarily learners' background characteristics such as age, year at university, and gender. Among these factors, academic majors stand out as a particularly influential source of variation. For instance, Chiba (2016) interviewed university students about learning support and found different attitudes toward studying. In science, students who write experimental reports tend to follow instruction manuals, allowing them to proceed without confusion about themes or formats. However, they often seek advice from peers, senior students, or instructors regarding experimental methods and discussions and occasionally practice presentations after consultation. In contrast, humanities students, especially those writing argumentative essays, often choose broad topics and rely on online resources rather than books unless explicitly instructed. They generally work independently, but review their drafts for errors before submission. For presentations, often in group settings, students tend to consult with others and practice in advance.

These findings suggest that differences in students' academic majors might influence their attitudes toward and perceptions of English presentations. Students in fields where presentation skills are seen as essential may display a more constructive outlook and find greater value in presentations than those in fields where such skills are less emphasized.

Objectives of the Study

As discussed above, educators are increasingly incorporating oral presentations into EFL classes in Japan to enhance communicative competence and highlight the growing importance of presentation tasks. However, it remains unclear whether this emphasis helps learners develop a clear understanding of what a good presentation entails. Moreover, research exploring students' attitudes toward and views on English presentations is limited. To address this gap, the present study investigates the following research questions:

RQ1: What factors underlie Japanese university students' perceived presentation skills and their attitudes toward presentations?

RQ2: What are the relationships between the identified factors of Japanese university students' perceived presentation skills and their attitudes toward presentations?

RQ3: How do Japanese university students' academic majors influence the extracted factors related to their perceived presentation abilities and attitudes toward presentations?

Method

Participants

A total of 110 students from two universities in Japan (31 males; 79 females) participated in this study. Of these, 50 were first-year students and 60 were second-year students. They were enrolled in general English courses and specialized in education- and science-related disciplines (62 and 48 students, respectively).

Research Instruments

This study employed a three-part questionnaire to collect data. The first part comprised items measuring participants' attitudes toward and perceptions of the English presentations. The second part included items assessing students' academic motivation for university learning. The third part contained items related to the participants' background information (e.g., academic major, year at university, gender, and most recent TOEIC score). Considering that this study aimed to explore Japanese university students' attitudes toward and perceptions of English presentations, only the items from the first part and the academic majors from the third part were analyzed.

The analysis focused on 18 presentation-related items. These items were adapted from Yukishige et al. (2007) and measured on a 6-point Likert scale. They addressed two primary areas: (1) students' perceived abilities in presentation skills, such as "*I'm good at using body language effectively during presentations in English*" and "*I can use visual aids well to explain concepts during presentations in English*"; and (2) their attitudes toward presentations, as reflected in statements like "*I think giving presentations in English is important for future jobs*" and "*I actually enjoy giving presentations in English.*"

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected during the spring and fall semesters of 2024. The questionnaire was distributed to the students before, during, or after class.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data obtained were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 29. For RQ1, the dataset from the questionnaire was subjected to factor analysis to reveal the underlying structures of Japanese university students' attitudes toward and perceptions of their presentations. For RQ2, correlational techniques were used to describe the strength and direction of the linear relationships between the factors identified in RQ1. Finally, for RQ3, a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine the influence of learners' academic majors on the factors identified through the factor analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Factors Underlying Japanese University Students' Perceived Presentation Skills and Their Attitudes Toward Presentations (RQ1)

For RQ1, we first examined whether the data met the necessary statistical assumptions for exploratory factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (= .87), which assesses the proportion of variance in the variables that may be attributed to the underlying factors, was equal to or greater than .60. Additionally, Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 1382.18$, $p < .001$), which evaluates whether the variables are sufficiently correlated for factor analysis, was significant ($p < .05$), confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis.[1] Subsequently, we conducted a maximum likelihood factor analysis with promax rotation, which yielded a three-factor structure accounting for 60.31% of the total variance. Cronbach's alpha values for the three factors ranged from .85 to .90, demonstrating adequate internal consistency.

Table 1 shows a factor matrix, with item loadings greater than .30 as the cut-off criterion, and Kaiser's criterion with eigenvalues greater than 1 (Field, 2009).

Table 1: Summary of Factor Analysis Results

Factors	Factor loadings			*M*	*S.D.*
	1	2	3		
Factor 1: *Need for presentations* (α=.90)				3.82	1.16
• Necessary to make presentations in English for future jobs (P12)	.88			3.95	1.60
• Important to learn how to give presentations in English classes (P17)	.87			4.43	1.21
• Hoping to become proficient in English presentations (P18)	.84			4.73	1.28
• Necessary to give presentations in English for future study (P13)	.82			3.60	1.60
• Rewarding to give presentations in English (P15)	.62			3.21	1.45
• Fun to give a presentation in English (P14)	.53			2.99	1.37
Factor 2: *Confidence in the performance stage* (α=.90)				2.89	0.96
• Confident in handling the Q&A session in English after a presentation (P9)		.97		2.33	1.01
• Good at giving presentations in English while considering time and environments (P10)		.76		2.82	1.14
• Proficient to speak with proper pronunciation and intonation (P3)		.75		3.01	1.26
• Confident in giving presentations in English (P11)		.73		2.31	1.33
• Good at speaking clearly with appropriate volume and speaking pace (P2)		.59		3.58	1.14
• Proficient to use body language effectively during presentations in English (P1)		.52		3.28	1.17
Factor 3: *Confidence in the preparation stage* (α=.85)				3.84	0.95
• Good at creating appropriate visual aids that match the content and topic (P5)			.91	4.08	1.16
• Can use various devices and media effectively during presentations in English (P4)			.90	3.83	1.37
• Can effectively use visual aids to explain concepts during presentations in English (P6)			.74	3.58	1.24
• Can understand what makes a good English presentation (P16)			.40	3.63	1.23
• Can create a script in English after writing an outline (P8)			.39	3.95	1.25
• Can write a presentation script in English after considering the overall structure (P7)			.30	3.97	1.26

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[1] https://www.onlinespss.com/statistical-tests-in-spss/reporting-factor-analysis-in-spss/#1583256390770-88abcc1c-bfb65b58-11128773-e8b2

A closer examination of the results provided insight into the characteristics of each factor. Six items were loaded onto Factor 1, all of which related to how students perceived the need for and importance of presentation skills. Representative items include "*It is necessary to make presentations in English for future jobs*" (P12) and "*It is important to learn how to give presentations in English classes*" (P17). Accordingly, this factor was labeled "Need for presentations." For Factor 2, six items were loaded onto this factor pertaining to confidence in presentation performance. Examples include "*I'm proficient to speak with proper pronunciation and intonation*" (P3) and "*I'm confident in giving presentations in English*" (P11). Therefore, this factor was labeled "Confidence on the performance stage." Finally, six items were loaded onto Factor 3 reflected the aspects of presentation preparation. Representative items include "*I'm good at creating appropriate visual aids that match the content and topic*" (P5) and "*I can create a script in English after writing an outline*" (P8). Given the focus on presentation preparation, this factor was labeled "Confidence in the presentation stage."

In the next step, we combined six items for each factor to generate composite scores, which allowed us to examine the overall characteristics of each factor. As shown in Table 1, the highest mean score was 3.84 for "*Confidence in the preparation stage.*" The second highest was 3.82 for "*Need for presentations,*" and the third was 2.89 for "*Confidence in the performance stage.*" These results showed that Japanese university students tended to feel more confident about preparing presentations and perceived presentation skills to be necessary. However, their confidence diminished when they had to deliver presentations in English.

The Relationships Between the Extracted Factors of Japanese University Students' Perceived Presentation Skills and Their Attitudes Toward Presentations (RQ2)

Correlation analyses were performed for RQ2. Table 2 presents the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. As shown in the table, the factors exhibited moderate to strong correlation. Specifically, the correlation coefficient between "*Confidence in the performance stage*" and "*Confidence in the preparation stage*" was .69, indicating a relatively strong association between these two dimensions of confidence. This suggests that both preparation and performance confidence contribute significantly to learners' overall confidence in delivering presentations. Additionally, "*Need for presentations*" demonstrated a higher correlation with "*Confidence in the performance stage*" ($r = .44$) than with "*Confidence in the preparation stage* ($r = .39$)." This implies that the more confident the students became, the more they saw presentations as necessary, and vice versa.

Table 2: Correlation Coefficients for the Extracted Factors

Factors	1	2	3
1. *Need for presentations*	1.00		
2. *Confidence in the performance stage*	.44*	1.00	
3. *Confidence in the preparation stage*	.39*	.69*	1.00

*$p<.001$

Difference in Students' Academic Majors and Extracted Factors Related to Perceived Presentation Skills and Attitudes (RQ3)

For RQ3, we examined the effects of students' majors (science vs. education) on the three extracted factors. Prior to conducting the analysis, we confirmed that the data met the

statistical assumptions for MANOVA. Box's M test (Box's Test for Equivalence of Covariance Matrices), a parametric test used to assess the equality (homogeneity) of covariance matrices, yielded a non-significant result ($p = .18$), indicating that the covariance matrices were found to be equal (homogeneous) and the assumption was satisfied. We subsequently performed a one-way MANOVA with the mean scores of the three factors as dependent variables. The result showed that all multivariate F statistics (Pillai's trace, Wilks' lambda, Hotelling's trace, and Roy's largest root) were significant, with Wilks' lambda = .71, $F(3, 106) = 14.38$, $p < .001$, *partial eta squared* = .29, indicating a significant multivariate effect of student majors. Subsequently, we conducted a univariate analysis of variance for each of the three dependent variables. The results revealed a significant effect of major on Factor 1 ($F(1, 109) = 43.67$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .29$) and Factor 2 ($F(1, 109) = 4.66$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$). However, no significant effect of major was observed for Factor 3 ($F(1, 109) = 3.71$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2 = .03$).

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the mean scores of the factors categorized by factor and student major. The results indicated notable differences between education and science majors in terms of "*Need for presentation*" and "*Confidence in the performance stage.*" Specifically, educational majors reported a greater perceived need for presentations and higher confidence in presentation performance. These results suggest that students' academic majors may play a role in shaping their perceived need for presentation skills and confidence.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on Factors and Majors

Factor	Major	*n*	*M*	*S.D.*
Need for presentations	Education	62	4.37	0.94
	Science	48	3.11	1.04
Confidence in the performance stage	Education	62	3.06	1.05
	Science	48	2.67	0.79
Confidence in the preparation stage	Education	62	3.99	0.99
	Science	48	3.65	0.86

Discussion and Conclusion

This section discusses the findings of the study and presents the conclusions. Based on the three research questions, we can draw the following conclusions: (1) Japanese students tend to have greater confidence in presentation preparation and a stronger sense of the necessity of presentation skills; (2) they are less confident in delivering presentations in English; and (3) academic majors have an impact on both the necessity of presentation skills and confidence in presentation performance.

From a pedagogical perspective, we propose two suggestions. First, previous research has shown that Japanese students often lack confidence in English communication because of factors such as speaking anxiety (e.g., Maher & King, 2020; Samimy & Kobayashi, 2004; Sato, 2020). Our findings support this claim, although variations exist depending on the academic major. Therefore, in presentation education, emphasis should be placed on fostering students' speaking confidence, particularly when speaking in front of an audience and engaging in Q&A sessions. These moments can be especially anxiety-inducing for them (Kobayashi, 2021).

Regarding academic background, previous research frequently suggests that students with different academic backgrounds display different attitudes toward studying (Chiba, 2016) and that science majors require presentation skills, particularly in English (e.g., Iwami, 2022; Shimamura, 2021). However, our findings indicate that this may not always be the case. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that education majors tend to have more opportunities to present their work and participate in activities, such as volunteering and part-time jobs. These experiences may contribute to both greater confidence and a heightened sense of the necessity for presentation skills. Nevertheless, as students advance in their studies, science majors may begin to recognize the importance of presentation skills and adjust their attitudes accordingly. Therefore, we suggest raising students' awareness of the relevance of presentation skills in their future careers and increasing their opportunities for presentation practice.

For future research, we propose two directions. First, students' motivation to study at the university level may influence their attitudes toward and views of presentations. Examining this factor along with other potential influences could yield valuable insights. Second, further research on effective measures to boost students' presentation confidence, including preparation methods and strategies to enhance English-speaking confidence, would be beneficial. Addressing these concerns is essential for educators to better understand the needs of Japanese university students and improve pedagogical practices and assessment methods through both quantitative and qualitative research.

English-speaking proficiency is essential for Japanese university students, and presentation education can serve as the first step in developing this ability. Developing English presentation skills not only opens doors to academic success but also helps equip students for their professional careers.

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