



“AS I THINK OF MY PRESENTATION ...”
TERTIARY-LEVEL EFL STUDENTS’ EMOTIONAL
REACTIONS TOWARDS ORAL PRESENTATION

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Abstract:

Oral presentation—a special form of public speaking in the context of second language (L2) learning—is a widely used activity at the tertiary level, both as a speech task and a form of assessment. While ample empirical evidence indicates that delivering a speech before an audience induces anxiety for most individuals, even when speaking in their native language, relatively little is known about the emotional experience of presenting a speech in a second language. To explore the emotional challenges public speaking in the L2 might pose to learners, this study examined tertiary-level EFL students’ emotional reactions to an upcoming in-class presentation. While the primary focus of the study was anxiety in response to L2 presentations, participants were unaware of this to ensure an unbiased assessment of anxiety’s importance relative to other emotions. A unique feature of the study is its focus on pre-presentation experiences, a topic hitherto unexplored in L2 research. The participants were 33 English Studies students from a Hungarian university. Their affective responses were investigated longitudinally, at three key junctures during the semester: (1) upon receiving the presentation task, (2) after deciding whether to present individually or with a partner, and (3) in the run-up to the presentation. Each time, participants responded to a short pre-task questionnaire with open-ended questions. The results have shown that anxiety was a prominent emotion during the pre-presentation period at all three significant events examined. It was detectable as soon as the presentation task was announced, influenced learners’ choices of paired rather than individual presentation, and showed a marked increase in the lead-up to the talk. The study has important pedagogical implications.

Keywords: public speaking anxiety, foreign language anxiety, oral presentation, EFL presentations, L2 presentations, emotional reactions, affective responses, tertiary EFL

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1. Introduction

Giving a speech or presentation before an audience is a situation that most individuals find anxiety-provoking. In fact, survey data consistently ranks public speaking as one of people’s top fears (Dwyer & Davidson, 2012). Considering the significance of public speaking skills in both educational contexts and beyond the classroom, it is not surprising that considerable attention has been devoted to researching the causes and consequences of this anxiety associated with anticipating or presenting a speech, referred to as public speaking anxiety (PSA) (Daly, McCroskey, Ayres, Hopf, Sonandre, & Wongprasert, 2009). Moreover, various psychology-based interventions have been developed to address this specific form of communication apprehension and help individuals cope with public speaking situations (Bodie, 2010).

But what about public speaking in a second or foreign language (L2)? If giving a speech can feel like a daunting experience in one’s native language (L1), presenting in a second language might feel exponentially so. In addition to *anxiety arising from speaking to an audience* (PSA), the L2 speaker might also experience *anxiety related to speaking in a foreign language*, known as foreign language anxiety (FLA) (Horwitz, Horvitz, and Cope, 1986). While anxiety has been the most well-researched psychological variable in language learning, examined across diverse settings and language situations (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Gkonou, Daubney, & Dewaele, 2017), oral presentation—a special form of public speaking in the context of L2 learning—has not received much attention from researchers (Kelsen, 2019; Tsang, 2022).

The scarcity of studies on anxiety related to L2 oral presentations is rather surprising, given that research into L2-related anxiety consistently shows that while reading, writing, and listening can all be sources of anxiety, it is oral communication that has the greatest ability to provoke anxiety (Kim, 2009; MacIntyre, 2017; Price, 1991). Moreover, large group or full-class activities have been ranked as more anxiety-arousing compared to those performed in pairs or small groups (Koch & Terrell, 1991; Woodrow, 2006; Young, 1990). In light of these findings, oral presentations—typically involving one student standing in front of the whole class and delivering a talk—deserve more attention in L2 research. The findings of the psychological literature on PSA in the L1 cannot fully account for the unique experience and challenges of presenting a speech in an L2; therefore, more research is needed to further explore the emotional challenges public speaking in the L2 might pose to learners (Kelsen, 2019; Tsang, 2022). The present investigation in the context of tertiary-level EFL classes aims to contribute to this end.

2. Previous research on anxiety in L2 oral presentations

The relatively few prior studies focusing on anxiety in L2 oral presentations have typically been conducted in the context of tertiary EFL or English medium content classes. It is in these instructional settings that presenting speeches in the target language (TL) is most common, both as a speech task and a form of assessment.

Some of these investigations have taken the form of correlational studies, examining relationships between anxiety in EFL presentations and other learner variables as potential predictors of anxiety. One of the examined learner characteristics was self-perceptions. A study of tertiary EFL students in Hong Kong focused on self-perceptions of pronunciation—a salient feature in L2 speaking—and found that the higher the self-ratings for pronunciation, the less anxiety respondents displayed in oral presentations (Tsang, 2022). This finding suggests that self-perceived pronunciation can predict how anxious learners feel when delivering a speech in an L2.

Another study in the same instructional setting explored the relationship between students’ self-perceived competence in the delivery of oral presentations and fear of public speaking (Tsang, 2020). The results have demonstrated close relationships between different aspects of self-rated presentation delivery (e.g., speech, body language, psychology) and PSA. These findings suggest that self-perceived delivery skills can also play a crucial role in predicting learners’ levels of L2 public speaking anxiety.

Besides self-perceptions, personality traits have also been postulated to be related to anxiety associated with delivering EFL presentations. A study of English for specific purposes (ESP) students in Taiwan explored the relationship between Extraversion, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, Openness to experience, and public speaking anxiety (Kelsen, 2019). The results have shown that Extraversion and Openness to experience were associated with lower levels of PSA, while Neuroticism and Conscientiousness were associated with higher levels of PSA. Furthermore, students higher in Extraversion, Conscientiousness, and Openness to experience generally had more positive mindsets regarding presentations and experienced less Physical, Preparation, and Performance anxiety. These findings indicate that personality traits and mindsets can also play a role in determining learners’ propensity towards feelings of anxiety related to L2 presentations.

A different line of inquiry—typically small-scale studies conducted in intact EFL classes—has taken a different approach, giving centre stage to the learners’ perspectives. One of these examined Turkish EFL students’ perceptions of the effects of a three-week oral presentation training and subsequent classroom presentations on their language skills, motivation, and speech anxiety (Gürbüz & Cabaroğlu, 2021). The findings suggest that preliminary presentation instruction and repeated exposure to oral presentations are instrumental in reducing anxiety, as they are likely to increase learners’ chances of success and thereby their confidence in delivering talks.

Another study in this category investigated Hungarian university students’ experiences of an EFL presentation delivered in their regular language development class (Tóth, 2019). The results have shown that presenting in the TL can be perceived as an overly anxiety-provoking task even by advanced-level learners (B2⁺/C1), with an unexpectedly high percentage of them experiencing considerable or even extreme anxiety (≥ 8 on a scale of 10). The study has provided empirical evidence that the complex anxiety reaction in response to delivering an L2 presentation comprises elements of PSA and FLA, as evidenced by reported anxiety triggers such as feeling spotlighted, audience-

related worries, negative self-perceptions, and speech-related concerns. The latter includes not only delivery issues but also potential language problems unique to L2 speakers (e.g., making mistakes, not finding the right words, mispronouncing words, poor accent).

To examine whether making an EFL presentation might be less anxiety-provoking if done in pairs rather than individually, a second study in the same Hungarian university EFL setting has examined learners’ experiences of presenting a speech with a partner, again in the context of regular language classes (Tóth, 2021). The results have shown that pair presenters’ self-rated anxiety levels did not differ significantly from those of individual presenters in the earlier study (Tóth, 2019). This indicates that presenting with a partner does not automatically result in lower anxiety for learners. The high percentage of pair presenters with high anxiety (≥ 8 on a scale of 10) suggests that L2 oral presentation, even if done with a partner, has the potential to generate high anxiety in learners.

3. Focus, rationale, and research questions

The unique feature of this study is that rather than targeting learners’ experiences during an actual delivery, it focuses on the pre-presentation/pre-speech stages. It aims to examine what thoughts, feelings, and emotions participants encounter before giving an assigned EFL presentation, zooming in on three significant events: (1) receiving the public speaking assignment, (2) deciding whether to present on their own or with a partner, and (3) the run-up to the presentation. Although the primary focus of the investigation was to gauge how prominent anxiety was in the pre-presentation period, participants were never asked about anxiety directly. The rationale for this approach was to avoid leading them and to shed light on the full range of their emotional experiences rather than just the negative emotion of anxiety (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dörnyei and Ryan, 2015)

The reason why the pre-presentation stage was chosen as the focus of inquiry is twofold. First, research on PSA indicates that anxiety related to presenting a speech does not start with the onset of the talk. In fact, the anticipation of giving a speech may produce more anxiety than the speech itself (Beatty, Kruger, and Springhorn, 1976; Behnke and Sawyer, 1999). Second, exploring the anticipatory period can shed light on the thoughts, feelings, and emotions the prospect of giving an L2 presentation triggers in learners, providing insight into how they conceptualise L2 presentations. In short, the focus is not on learners’ real experiences but rather on their images or inner scripts of presenting in an L2. This is an important area to explore, as, according to one of the most widely acknowledged theories of PSA—the cognitive view— anxiety about speaking in public does not primarily arise from the public speaking situation itself but rather from how one sees and interprets this situation (Bodie, 2012). For instance, whether one views public speaking as a performance requiring special skills or talent, or simply as communication not very different from “*everyday conversation*” (Motley, 1997, referred to in Bodie, 2012),

is very likely to affect how much anxiety one experiences. People with high PSA have been found to entertain more negative thoughts and envision themselves differently in public speaking situations than those with low PSA. This shows that negative or problematic cognitions about the public speaking situation or about the self as a public speaker are related to feelings of PSA (Bodie, 2012).

Studying pre-speech cognition and emotions might be valuable in L2 research for several reasons. It can reveal how positive or negative learners’ mindsets and emotional predispositions are towards L2 presentations. Additionally, it can bring to light problematic or dysfunctional cognitions that could be addressed to help learners overcome their anxiety. Furthermore, it can be instrumental in identifying specific antecedents and underlying mechanisms unique to the anxiety related to presenting a speech in a foreign language. To date, no research has examined L2 learners’ pre-presentation thoughts and emotions in response to an assigned oral presentation in the TL.

This study aims to fill this research niche by addressing the following research questions:

RQ1: What thoughts, feelings, and emotions do tertiary-level EFL students express towards oral presentation (OP) at the beginning of the semester?

- 1.1 How prominent is anxiety in participants’ initial reactions to the OP requirement?
- 1.2 How prominent is anxiety in participants’ appraisal of the option of presenting on their own or with a partner and their actual choices of individual or paired presentation?

RQ2: What thoughts, feelings, and emotions do tertiary-level EFL students express in the run-up to their presentation?

- 2.1 How prominent is anxiety in participants’ pre-presentation thoughts and feelings days before the talk is to be delivered? Is there an increase relative to their initial reactions?
- 2.2 How prominent is anxiety in participants’ visualisations of delivering their presentations?

4. Methods

4.1 Participants and setting

The participants were 33 students in the second year of their English Studies BA program at a Hungarian university. Among the 33 students, 25 were female and 8 were male, reflecting the typical gender ratio of students enrolled in English Studies programs in Hungary, with females outnumbering males. The sample consisted of 31 Hungarian students and two international students (one male and one female). All participants were of typical university age (between 19 and 24) and had studied English for an average of 11.6 years at the time of the study. Their proficiency level ranged between B2+ and C1, as evidenced by their successful completion of the first-year Complex Language Exam,

which evaluated candidates’ written and spoken proficiencies at the B2+–C1 level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

4.2 Procedure

As part of the course requirements, participants were required to deliver an oral presentation in their regular language development class. The presentation had to be related to one of the two topics assigned in the second-year curriculum: *Arts & Entertainment* or *Health & Lifestyles*. Students had the freedom to choose between the two topics and decide which aspect of the chosen topic to explore in their talk. They were also given the option to present individually or opt for a paired presentation, where they could present with a partner. Participants selecting the latter option could choose their partner. Individual presentations were required to last for 5-10 minutes, while paired presentations for 10-20 minutes. In both cases, they were followed by a 5-minute Q & A session.

To gather information on pre-presentation thoughts, feelings, and emotions, data were collected three times during the semester, following significant events leading up to the presentation: (1) after the first class, during which the presentation task was announced and explained, (2) after the second class, when participants chose between individual or paired presentations, and (3) in the week preceding the presentation. On each occasion, participants responded to open-ended questions sent through the Neptun Education System, the online education interface used by Hungarian universities. They were requested to provide their responses within 24 hours. Table 1 details the timing of data collection, the three pre-task questionnaires, and the objectives of each data collection stage.

Table 1: Timing of data collection, instruments, and aims

| Time | Pre-task questionnaires | Aims |
|---------------|--|--|
| Week 1 | <p>Presentation task & me</p> <p>1) In our first class today, you learned that this semester, an oral presentation is also included among the requirements of your language development class. What was your initial reaction—your thoughts and feelings—when you heard this? Please provide reasoning for your answer.</p> <p>2) How do you feel about the possibility of choosing between an individual or paired presentation? Please provide reasoning for your answer.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore what thoughts, feelings, and emotions are automatically associated with EFL oral presentation. • Examine how prominent anxiety is in initial reactions. • Explore if anxiety is an issue in participants’ appraisal of the option between individual or paired OP. |
| Week 2 | <p>Your choice</p> <p>Why did you choose the individual or paired presentation? Please justify your decision.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore whether anxiety is a factor in choice of individual or paired presentation. |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Week preceding the talk | Next week's presentation 1) Next Wednesday, you will be giving a presentation in class. When you think about this now, what comes to your mind first? What feelings and thoughts arise? 2) I ask you to imagine yourself presenting in the next class (you can close your eyes if it's easier). How do you see yourself? How do you feel in this role? Please describe this inner image! | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore thoughts, feelings, and emotions in the run-up to the OP. • Examine how prominent anxiety is. • Examine how students envision themselves delivering their OP. |
|--------------------------------|---|---|

The language of the questionnaires was Hungarian for Hungarian participants and English for international students. Participants' responses to each open-ended question were moved into a separate file and coded for recurring themes, following the steps of qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2014; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

5. Results

5.1 How prominent is anxiety in participants' initial reactions to the oral presentation requirement?

Question 1 of the first pre-task questionnaire explored what thoughts, feelings, and emotions surfaced in participants' minds when the OP requirement was announced and explained in their first class. The objective was to uncover students' automatic responses or gut reactions to the idea of delivering a speech in the TL, aiming to gauge the extent to which this task was associated with anxiety in their minds. Figure 1 displays four primary types of emotional responses within the examined sample of 33 students, categorised as *neutral*, *negative/anxious*, *positive*, and *ambivalent*.

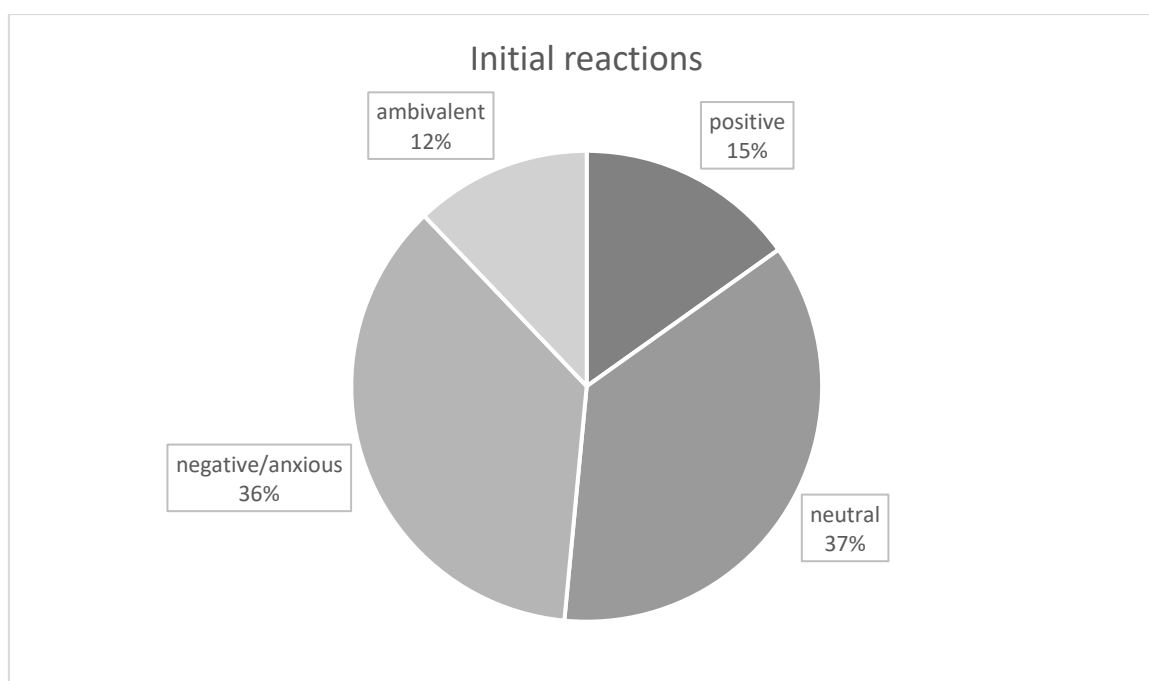


Figure 1: Participants' initial reactions to oral presentation as a course requirement

An examination of Figure 1 reveals that most respondents expressed neutral (37%) or negative/anxious (36%) feelings toward the OP assignment, with a considerably lower percentage displaying positive feelings (15%) and a small minority reporting ambivalent feelings (12%). The following paragraphs provide a brief description of students’ emotional reactions in the four categories.

Participants whose initial reactions were labelled as *neutral* tended to express the view that they were “OK with oral presentation as a course requirement”/ “did not mind it”/ “had no negative feelings about it”. However, they did not seem to express positive feelings either. They considered it merely a task that needed to be fulfilled to meet course requirements, evoking neither strong positive nor negative feelings. A sample response is:

“My first reaction? Quite neutral, I would say. My personality naturally leads to a kind of “once this task is given, it needs to be done” attitude – even though standing in front of people isn’t actually my favourite thing to do.” (#15)

Another sentiment expressed by learners in this category was that since presentations are a frequent requirement in the tertiary setting, they are perceived as routine assignments, no longer particularly exciting or stimulating for them. To quote a respondent on this:

“If I want to answer honestly, then this [the OP task] already seems a bit boring and straightforward to me. It’s okay, but there was a little hope within me that there might be a twist to it this time. Fortunately, there is! [the option of paired presentation]” (#18)

From the perspective of anxiety, the neutral feelings displayed by learners in this category toward the assigned oral presentation can be viewed as quite positive. These feelings suggest that, although respondents might have experienced anxiety about OP in the earlier stages of their language learning careers, they have now learned to take it in their stride, as reflected in the following quotes: “In the first two semesters, I would have stressed about it [OP], but by now I have outgrown that. Personally, I have no problem with presentations” (#10); “It [OP assignment] didn’t catch me off guard, as presentations are required in most seminars, and I already have neutral feelings towards it” (#32).

Participants whose initial reactions were labelled as negative/anxious (36% of the sample), on the other hand, unequivocally expressed that the first thoughts, feelings, and emotions that emerged when receiving the public speaking assignment were negative. The following excerpts illustrate the typical initial thoughts triggered by the presentation task in learners of this category:

“‘Oh no’ was my first, second, third, and fourteenth thought. I understand the essence and usefulness of the task, but I still feel just as awkward when I have to stand in front of everyone and deliver a monologue while the listeners sit in silence with poker faces. The

preparation (mentally) is even more stressful than this. Presentation is survivable, but it's unnecessary stress for me." (#4)

"My initial thought was, why do we have to present again?! I feel particularly uncomfortable when I have to stand in front of people, I'm not a fan of presentations." (#8)

What these quotes vividly illustrate is that the automatic response or gut reaction of these learners to the prospect of giving an oral presentation was one of instinctive refusal ("Oh, no"; "Why do we have to present?!"), a clear expression of a desire to avoid and spare themselves from the unpleasant situation that an EFL presentation represents to them.

Furthermore, the mere thought of having to give a presentation already filled respondents with fear and anxiety, plunging them into a negative emotional state, as evidenced by the following quotes:

"The first discernible feeling that engulfed me was fear, because I have never liked presenting. I have always been afraid of public speaking." (#11)

"When I first heard that there would be a presentation task as well, I got scared. Speaking in front of people is difficult for me as I freeze, and the perfectly rehearsed presentation I've practiced at home doesn't come across as well, which unfortunately I tend to experience as a failure." (#14)

"My initial thought wasn't the happiest, unfortunately. Perhaps this is what causes the greatest difficulty for me – having to stand up and speak in front of others. Unfortunately, in many cases, nervousness takes over, and because of this, I might freeze or, what's most embarrassing for me, I make a lot of grammar mistakes while speaking." (#25)

These excerpts show that learners did not need to deliver the presentation to experience anxiety; hearing about this requirement in their first class was sufficient to elicit the same affective response. As demonstrated, one participant felt "engulfed by fear", while another "got scared" when facing the prospect of having to give a presentation during the semester.

Student responses also provide insights into the origins of negative feelings. The most frequently mentioned reasons were (1) the asymmetrical communication situation, e.g., "I have to stand in front of everyone and deliver a monologue while the listeners sit in silence with poker faces" (#4); (2) the feeling of being spotlighted, e.g., "I don't like to perform, stand in front of people with their attention focused on me" (#19); and (3) the presence of disturbing memories from previous presentations marked by negative experiences such as *freezing, blocking, underperforming, and making mistakes* due to anxiety.

Participants whose initial reactions were labelled as positive made no references to anxiety, and their responses reflected a positive attitude towards the OP assignment.

Unlike learners in the negative/anxious category, this minority of participants (15%) welcomed the inclusion of OP in the course requirements. Sample response: “*Personally, I was very happy that there will be presentations as well*” (#5). The main reason provided by respondents was that OP is a *useful* task, not only for language development but also for acquiring other essential skills. Participants highlighted that classroom presentations help them become accustomed to speaking before an audience, a particularly crucial skill for students training to be teachers. To quote a participant:

“I’m glad that a presentation has been included among the class requirements. I believe that from a learning perspective, it’s extremely beneficial for students to prepare a 10-minute presentation in front of a whole group. Since I’m studying to become a teacher, I consider it important to get used to presenting in front of people.” (#28)

However, few respondents expressed the view that they were happy about the OP requirement due to task enjoyment. Only one respondent contended that he *enjoyed presenting on topics he was interested in* (#32), while another participant reported she *found the preparation process and listening to others’ talks enjoyable* (#31).

Participants whose initial reactions were labelled *ambivalent* (12%) had mixed feelings about the OP assignment. On the one hand, like their peers in the positive response category, they regarded it as a *great opportunity for practising public speaking*, which they deemed *important* and *useful* for their future. On the other hand, they shared sentiments with classmates in the negative/anxious category in several ways. For example, they also (1) experienced anxiety upon learning about the OP requirement, e.g., “*Hearing about the requirements I started feeling a bit scared*” (#20); (2) expressed their dislike for the public speaking situation, e.g., “*I don’t enjoy being in the spotlight*” (#7); and (3) found it challenging to approach presentations calmly, e.g., “*there’s still a bit of fear in me: standing in front of others and speaking remains a daunting thing*” (#13).

The four identified emotional responses can be positioned on an imaginary scale, illustrating the extent to which L2 oral presentations were associated with anxiety in participants’ minds. At one end of the scale, we find the *negative/anxious* reaction, demonstrated by an instinctive desire to avoid the task (“*Oh, no!*”; “*Why do we have to do this?*”), while at the other end, there is the *positive* affective response, demonstrated by an eagerness to embrace the opportunity to practise public speaking in the EFL classroom. In between these extremes, the *ambivalent* response can be placed, characterized by a mixture of positive feelings (primarily perceived usefulness of the task) and anxiety, and the *neutral* stance, which reflects no apparent anxiety, but lacks marked positive emotions as well.

5.2 How prominent is anxiety in participants’ appraisal of the option of presenting on their own or with a partner?

Question 2 of the first pre-task questionnaire (see Table 1) explored whether anxiety was a factor in how participants perceived the choice between an individual or pair

presentation. As Figure 2 shows, most respondents (85%) welcomed the idea of having the right to decide whether to make their presentations on their own or with a partner. Among them, 55% cited anxiety as a reason, while 30% mentioned other reasons.

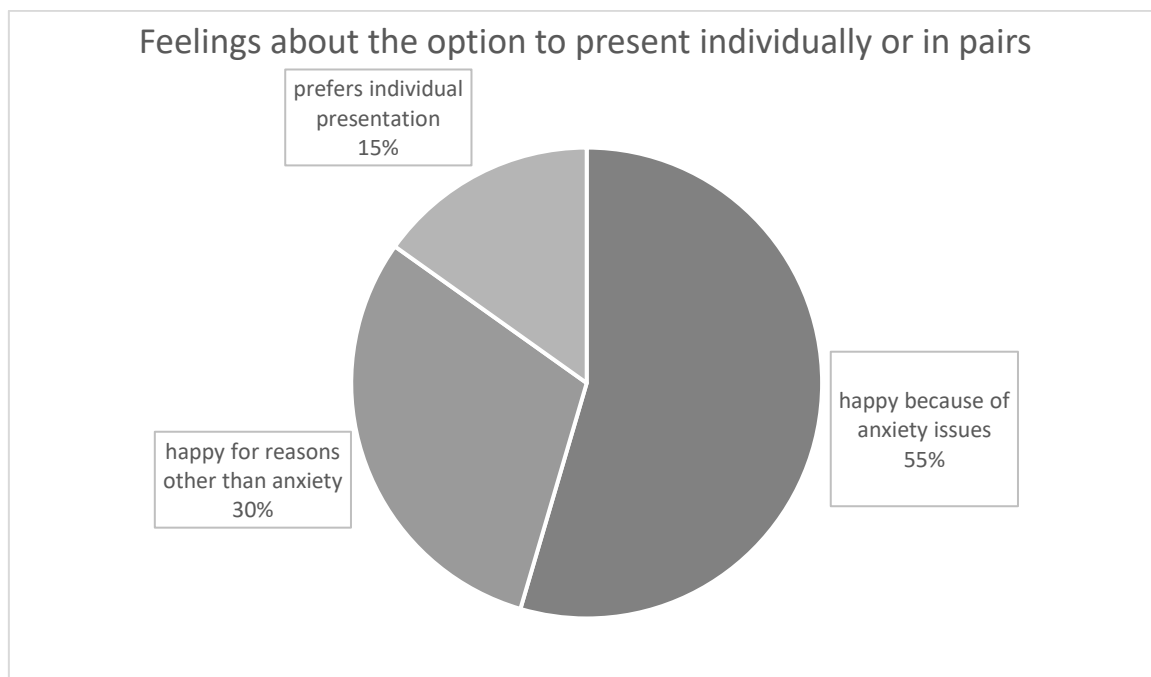


Figure 2: Participants' appraisal of the option of presenting on their own or with a partner

Respondents who cited anxiety as a reason tended to refer to the paired option as *a great relief/ great thing/ excellent idea* for students who *are anxious/ tend to get nervous/ don't like standing in front of others alone*. A sample response:

"I think this is a great thing [paired option] because for those people who find such a task really challenging (like standing in front of others and presenting, AND doing it well) [respondent's emphasis], doing it together with someone can bring comfort ... It can be much more comfortable." (#15)

Respondents expressed that they were *very happy/ glad, even grateful* this option was offered to them. As one student put this: *"I think it's very considerate that there's a choice"* (#33). This indicates they welcomed the possibility of a paired presentation, as they felt presenting with a partner would increase their confidence about the task and make them feel, using their words, *much better/ less nervous/ more self-confident/ calmer*. This shows that they saw the paired option primarily as *"a good opportunity to share the nervousness"* (#1) and *"reduce the burden of the task"* (#33). Rather than mentioning other potential benefits, most respondents emphasised its ability to reduce anxiety for the following reasons: (1) *"students don't feel as alone in the task"* (#12), (2) *"a student who is braver and more open to speaking in front of others can pull the other student along with them"* (#9), (3) *"the focus of attention is divided"* between the two speakers (#6), (4) the partner is

"like a crutch", who can assist the other if they were to "get stuck or encounter a problem" (#21), and (5) presenting in pairs "can reduce the chances of long, nervously silent moments compared to presenting alone" (#27). These findings indicate that more than every other respondent (55%) appreciated the option of pair presentation because they believed presenting with a partner could help them better cope with the situation and feel less anxious about the assigned EFL presentation.

The remaining 30% of respondents who welcomed the free choice between individual or paired presentation, in contrast, provided strikingly different reasons for appreciating this opportunity. Some of them valued the choice itself, thanks to which "everyone has an option they feel comfortable with" (#29). Others expressed happiness at having the chance to try out something new besides the traditional individual presentation, as shown by the following excerpt: "I was particularly happy about this [option of paired presentation] because it allows us to experience a new form of presentation" (#18). Still others pointed to specific advantages of the paired option, such as helping students practise teamwork and bond with each other. Sample responses: "I see it [pair presentation] as a great opportunity because it allows practising an important skill, which is collaboration" (#23); "It [pair presentation] can foster stronger connections among students" (#18). Further reasons why respondents greeted this option were: "Sharing the work and responsibility with each other" (#11), "learning from each other" (#30), and the opportunity to receive feedback from the partner, e.g., "the other might mention my flaws so I can perfect my presentation" (#19). What responses in this category have in common is that anxiety does not appear as a factor in learners' appraisal of the paired option.

As displayed in Figure 2, a minority of the participants (15%) expressed a preference for presenting on their own and were happy they were not forced to work with a partner. A sample response is:

"I personally prefer to present alone, so I'm always happy when there's an opportunity for that. This is because, in this way, I can oversee the entire presentation, and everything is as I see it fit." (#20).

Among the reasons for this preference, respondents mentioned potential difficulties related to presenting in pairs. These challenges included (1) "aligning the thinking of two people" (#7), (2) finding a partner who takes the task equally seriously (e.g., "It can be difficult to work with someone who doesn't take the presentation as seriously as I do" #20), and (3) finding a partner willing to practise the talk together (e.g., "In many groups, I didn't feel like there was anyone who could motivate themselves even for one rehearsal" #10). Additionally, some respondents considered paired presentations "less personal" (#31) or "worse than solo presentations, as they are not practised enough" (#26). Anxiety did not emerge as a theme in this category either, however, it was implicit in the responses that presenting with a partner would be more stressful for these learners, as they had more trust in themselves than in working with someone else.

5.3 How prominent is anxiety in participants’ actual choices of individual or paired presentation?

The second pre-task questionnaire, administered after participants signed up for individual or paired presentations, enquired about the reasons behind their decision to present on their own or with a partner. The objective of this question was to determine whether anxiety played a role in respondents’ choices between the individual and paired options. Table 2 displays the number of students choosing individual versus pair presentations and the reasons behind their choices.

Table 2: Participants’ actual choices of individual or pair presentation and the reasons behind

| | N (33) | Reasons | |
|-------------------|--------|---------|-------|
| | | Anxiety | Other |
| Individual | 15 | 2 | 13 |
| Pair | 18 | 11 | 7 |

As shown, a higher number of participants opted for pair presentations compared to individual ones, with over half of the respondents favouring the paired option (55%), while slightly fewer chose the individual presentation (45%). Regarding the reasons behind these choices, anxiety emerged as a factor in almost 40% of the responses (13 cases), the majority of which were from participants opting for pair presentations (n=11). A comparison of the reasons provided by respondents choosing individual versus paired options reveals that, unlike in the case of individual presenters, anxiety was the predominant reason for selecting pair presentations. This is evident in the responses of almost two-thirds of the students (n=11) who chose this alternative. This finding indicates that the paired option was primarily favoured by students seeking emotional support from a fellow student to better cope with the presentation task.

Interestingly, anxiety also emerged as a reason for choosing individual presentations, albeit in a few cases (n=2). These students intentionally chose to present alone, putting themselves into what they believed to be a more challenging situation (i.e., individual presentation) to train themselves to speak in front of others and learn to manage their anxiety. This is evidenced by the following quotes: “*Why on my own? To conquer fear. Facing your fear makes you stronger*” (#6); “*I decided to do this presentation alone since I wanted to get out of my comfort zone and challenge myself a bit*” (#13).

In sum, anxiety played a role in both participants’ evaluation of the option to present individually or with a partner, as well as in their actual choices between individual or pair presentations.

5.4 How prominent is anxiety in participants’ pre-presentation thoughts and feelings days before the talk is to be delivered?

To elicit participants’ thoughts and emotional experiences in the run-up to their presentations, the third pre-task questionnaire was administered to students a week before their scheduled talk. The first question explored what thoughts and feelings came to mind when thinking about the upcoming speech in the next class, just a few days away

(see Table 1). Figure 3 displays the spectrum of thoughts and emotions identified in participants' responses, categorised as *positive*, *negative/anxious*, and a *mix of the two*.

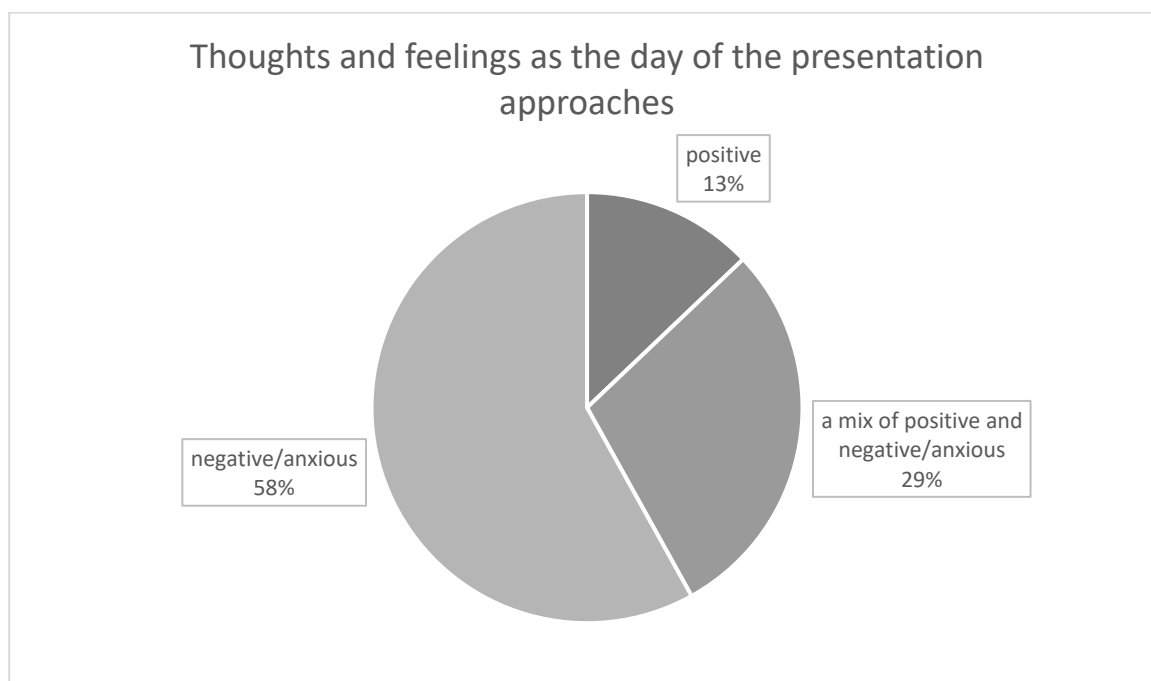


Figure 3: Participants' thoughts and feelings in the run-up to their presentations

As shown, a small minority of the respondents (13%) reported purely positive thoughts and feelings without any mention of anxiety. To give examples, when thinking about the upcoming presentation, one participant visualised her presentation slides in her mind's eye and experienced "a sense of calmness" while mentally scrolling through them (#29). Another respondent expressed a similar feeling of "calm and confident", attributing it to his "familiarity with the material to be discussed" (#25). Enthusiasm and eager anticipation of the presentation were further positive emotions identified, as illustrated by the following quote: "I feel I would like to present the topic we chose because it is a beloved topic for both of us." (#11). Finally, showcasing one's knowledge or skills and a desire or ambition to impress the audience were additional positive feelings surfacing in responses: "The first thing that comes to mind is that I need to impress people with my fluency level." (#10). As demonstrated, responses in this category reflect a positive state of mind and readiness to present the talk, evidenced by respondents feeling calm, well-prepared, knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and confident in themselves and their skills.

Quite the opposite picture emerged from the responses of as many as 58% of the participants at the other end of the spectrum of emotions, categorised as *negative/anxious* (see Figure 3). If anxiety did not even arise in the positive response category, it was the main and virtually only emotion that respondents in this category reported to describe their emotional experiences in the run-up to their presentation. The thought of the upcoming presentation induced a range of negative emotions, including fear, worry, pressure to do well, and nervousness, with some participants even reporting physical

symptoms, as demonstrated by the following excerpts: “When I think about the fact that I will be presenting in a few days, I feel very anxious. Trembling, stomach-ache, tight throat...” (#13); “Feelings of fear, worry, and a pressure to perform well tend to arise within me when I think about it” [the presentation] (#2); “If I think about having to give a presentation, I get nervous” (#20); “Worry is the predominant feeling now, but this will transition into nervousness” (#23).

Accompanying this anxious state of mind was another negative feeling identified in this category, which could be described as a strong desire or wish for the presentation to be over, so that they would not need to worry about it any longer. As respondents expressed: “I wish I were already done with it [the presentation]. I wouldn’t need to stress about it” (#14); “My first thought is finally it is going to happen because I feel as if a weight will be off my shoulders” (#6); “Honestly, I’m looking forward to getting it over with and having one less worry” (#23).

As evidenced by these excerpts, for respondents in the *negative/anxious* category, the upcoming presentation felt like a heavy burden or *weight* on their *shoulders*, which they could hardly wait to put down. In contrast to respondents looking forward to presenting a *beloved topic* or *impressing people* with their command of the TL, these students found the lead-up to the presentation so emotionally taxing that all they could wish for was to *get it over with*. One respondent confided that she felt so anxious as the day of the presentation was drawing closer that she started to wonder how she could avoid it altogether: “What comes to mind is that I would like to escape from this presentation, whatever the consequences might be. Unfortunately, it causes me too much stress” (#9).

As for the subject of the fears and worries arising in the run-up to the presentation, the following quote neatly encapsulates the main ingredients of respondents’ pre-presentation anxiety:

“I’m doubting myself and I feel like I should have taken more time to prepare. I’m really scared of embarrassing myself/making a joke out of myself. I think what I’m most scared of is letting others down - mostly my teacher - and not living up to the expectations I think people have for me, but I’m also scared of not living up to my own ones. I’m also scared that people will find my topic boring and that they won’t pay attention. Thinking about presenting is just really overwhelming.” (#12)

As shown, in the days leading up to the talk, students may have moments of self-doubt or lack confidence in their ability to deliver an effective presentation. This can manifest as questioning their preparation, fearing embarrassment, worrying about losing face, and being concerned about the audience’s reaction. Consequently, the run-up to the presentation might be *overwhelming* due to the troubling thoughts and worries swirling in their minds.

Other causes for concern emerging from the data were (1) a self-perceived lack of talent for giving speeches (e.g., “I’m nervous because I don’t consider myself a very good presenter” #26) and (2) the size of the audience – exaggeratedly referred to by a participant as a *crowd* (“I’m worried, as I will have to perform in front of a crowd” #16). The overstatement

obviously does not reflect the actual size of the audience (15 students) but rather the intensity of the respondent’s fear.

Hand in hand with the above-mentioned fears and worries specific to PSA, concerns pertaining to FLA were also detected in the *negative/anxious* category. These tended to centre around (1) the tension caused by speaking in a language other than one’s mother tongue, (2) uncertainty about topic-specific vocabulary, (3) word retrieval problems, and (4) stumbling over words. Some quotes exhibiting this: “I get a bit stressed at the thought of next week’s presentation, as I have to give the presentation in a language that is not my native tongue” (#7); “What I worry about is that the vocabulary related to the topic of “health” is quite diverse and specialized. Do I have this vocabulary?” (#17); “I’m worried that I might get stuck because I can’t recall a word or phrase in English” (#20); “I’ll have to calm myself down somehow because I’ll start babbling nervously and stumble over my words” (#22).

Finally, as Figure 3 shows, a third group of respondents (29%) displayed a mixed emotional response in the lead-up to the presentation. This response was characterized by the coexistence of both positive and negative thoughts and feelings, situated between the extremes of purely positive and predominantly negative/anxious reactions. On the positive side, participants reported positive feelings primarily related to the topic of their presentations. They expressed satisfaction in selecting a *highly interesting/ important/ close-to-them* topic that they *liked/ enjoyed talking about*. Furthermore, they also discussed feelings of *excitement* and *pleasant anticipation* regarding sharing their *thoughts/ important ideas/ new information* with their groupmates. On the negative side, alongside the positive thoughts and feelings, they mentioned *anxiety, stage jitters, nervousness, fear, and apprehension* as typical emotions when thinking about the upcoming presentation. The following excerpts provide insight into the mixed emotional response typical in this category, with positive and negative emotions hand in hand.

“First and foremost, I am excited because of the topic itself. The presentation will be about a subject that is highly interesting and important to me. However, I also feel a bit apprehensive because I don’t enjoy speaking in front of people, and I’m afraid of leaving out something important from what I want to say.” (#31)

“I feel nervous about speaking alone for 10 minutes in front of a whole group and keeping their attention. However, alongside this nervousness, I also feel a pleasant anticipation because I look forward to sharing my thoughts on the topic and sharing new information with the group.” (#27)

“I’m a bit anxious about how it will turn out, but I’m also looking forward to it because I really like the topic that my partner and I came up with.” (#29)

5.5 Is there an increase in the number of references to anxiety in the run-up to the presentation compared to participants’ initial reactions at the beginning of the semester?

Figure 4 displays participants’ emotional responses (1) after receiving the oral presentation task and (2) in the lead-up to the presentation.

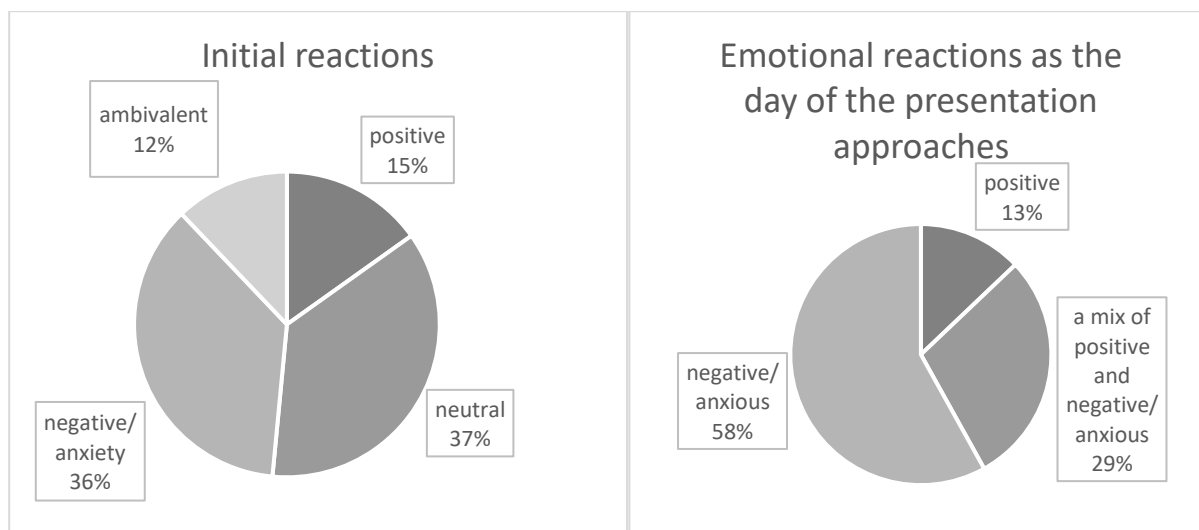


Figure 4: Participants’ emotional reactions at the beginning of the semester and in the run-up to the presentation

A comparison of participants’ initial reactions and their emotional responses as the day of the presentation approached reveals a substantial increase regarding anxiety and related negative emotions. Firstly, as shown, the percentage of respondents displaying a negative/anxious emotional reaction at the beginning of the semester (36%) has increased by 22% in the pre-presentation days (58%). Secondly, there is also a considerable increase in the percentage of participants experiencing anxiety together with positive emotions. As shown, 17% more students reported a mix of negative/anxious and positive feelings in the pre-presentation days (29%) than at the beginning of the semester (12%). Thirdly, the neutral emotional response category identified in participants’ initial reactions has disappeared altogether in the run-up to the presentation. This result suggests that participants who initially exhibited neutral feelings towards the OP task (37%) started to experience anxiety in the run-up to the talk, as evidenced by the increase in the size of both the *negative/anxious* and the *mix of positive and negative/anxious* categories. Finally, in parallel with the increase in references to anxiety, we can see a slight decrease (2%), in the percentage of positive emotional responses in participants’ initial reactions (15%) versus pre-presentation ones (13%). All in all, these results show that, except for a small minority (13%), most participants experienced anxiety in the lead-up to their presentation. At the beginning of the semester, 48% of the respondents reported anxiety (with or without positive feelings); in the days preceding the talk, this percentage rose to 87%, reflecting an almost 40% increase.

5.6 How prominent is anxiety in participants' visualisations of delivering their presentations?

On examining how prominent anxiety was in (1) participants' initial reactions to the presentation task, (2) their appraisal and actual choices of the paired vs. individual option, and (3) their emotional responses in the lead-up to the presentation, we finally explore how prominently anxiety figured in their visualisations of delivering their presentations. As shown in Table 1, question 2 of the third pre-task questionnaire asked participants to imagine themselves presenting their talk in the classroom and describe the inner image that appeared in their minds. Figure 5 displays the characteristics of participants' visualisations, categorised as *positive*, *negative/anxious*, and *a combination of anxiety with positive feelings*.

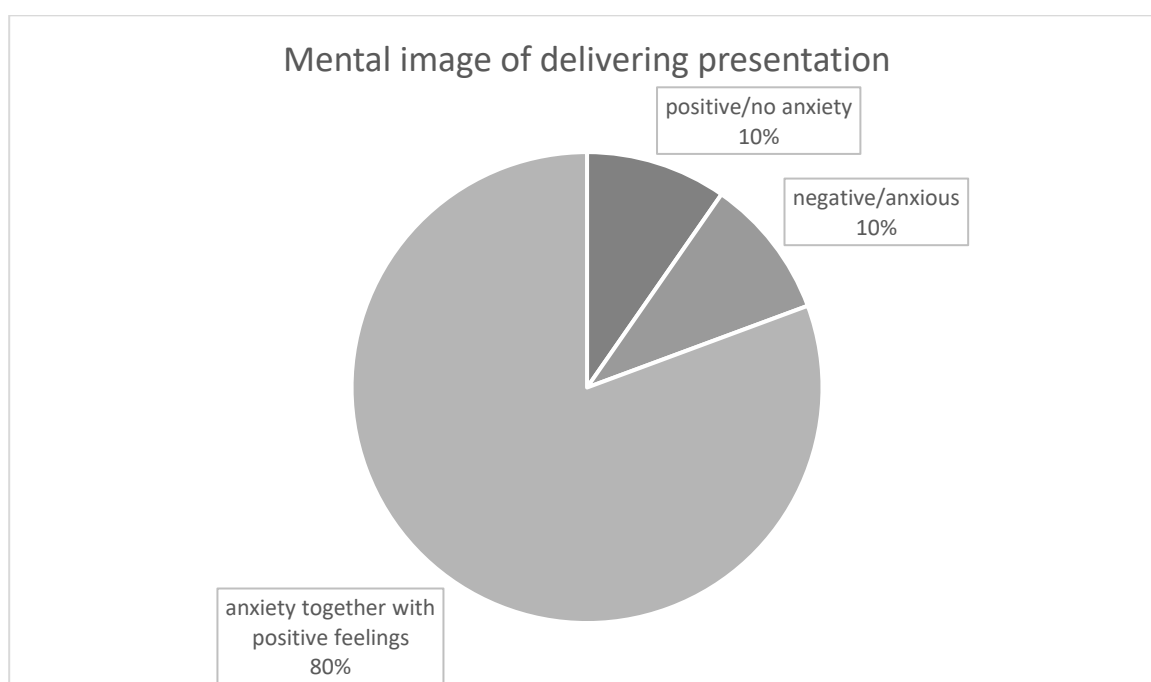


Figure 5: Participants' visualisations of delivering their presentations.

As shown, only a small percentage of the respondents visualised either an entirely positive/anxiety-free (10%) or an entirely negative/anxious image (10%). The majority (80%) envisioned themselves experiencing both positive thoughts and emotions, along with anxiety-related negative ones. In the following sections, the imagined pictures in the three categories will be compared in terms of: (1) how respondents saw/ felt about the audience, (2) how, in their mind's eye, they felt during the talk, and (3) how they saw their delivery/ themselves as a presenter.

Participants in the *positive/anxiety-free* category visualised themselves and the entire situation of presenting in front of their peers in a positive light. In their mind's eye, they saw themselves feeling confident and comfortable in the role of the presenter, appreciating rather than fearing being the centre of attention. Furthermore, they saw themselves enjoying their talks, envisioning themselves as competent presenters,

delivering clear and engaging speeches and able to maintain the audience's attention. To quote respondents:

"I feel comfortable, I enjoy the topic, and I appreciate the attention. I illuminate the others with my extensive knowledge on the subject." (#10)

"I see myself keeping eye contact with everyone and speaking in a way that is both engaging and understandable." (#28)

"I imagine what I will be wearing to feel comfortable. I stand under a bright spotlight, and all eyes are on me, but I don't worry too much. Everyone goes through the same experience, and this is just an ordinary Wednesday [day of the EFL class]" (#29)

These excerpts evoke images of students with positive mindsets and emotional predispositions towards the envisioned EFL presentation. This is manifested in their positive self-perception, both in terms of their subjective feelings during the imagined presentation and their image as presenters. The last quote vividly illustrates these learners' healthy perspective on the L2 public speaking situation, portraying it as a routine activity in an *ordinary* language class rather than something to fear and worry about.

Participants in the *negative/anxious* category visualised the same situation in a completely different light. For them, the entire imagined scenario of delivering their presentations was dominated by negative feelings and how these affected their subjective experience, speech, and use of the target language. When picturing themselves giving their talks, they saw themselves feeling *tense, nervous, anxious, uncomfortable, and unnatural*. They anticipated speaking at an unnaturally fast pace due to nervousness and expected further anxiety effects on their performance, such as blocking, making mistakes, and experiencing pronunciation issues. Apparently, they did not see themselves as effective presenters but rather as lacking confidence, unprofessional, and inauthentic. Quoting respondents:

"I'm very anxious. I feel very tense in this situation. It doesn't feel natural. I don't think I can present my topic confidently and smoothly. It's not professional." (#2)

"What I see is I'm nervous and I speak quickly. And because I'm advancing in my train of thought, I make pronunciation mistakes. I feel uncomfortable." (#4)

"I feel I'm not gonna do good, I'm gonna block down. I see myself as nervous, speaking fast, and just wanting to get it over with. Everyone will see how anxious I am, how much I'm trembling, and I'm thinking that I'd rather just leave the room." (#9)

The above quotes exemplify negative visualisations typical in this category. What these mental images share is a pronounced self-focus and negativity in every aspect: (1) negative thoughts/negative self-talk concerning performance, (2) negative feelings/opinions about delivery and language, (3) awareness of physical signs of anxiety along with concerns about their visibility to the audience, and finally (4) an overall sense of being out of place and a desire to exit the uncomfortable situation.

Participants whose visualizations were categorized as *a combination of anxiety with positive feelings* experienced a dual perspective. On one hand, they envisioned themselves undergoing anxiety during the imagined presentation; on the other hand, they also foresaw positive feelings and emotions. One respondent in this category described this experience as *conflicting emotions within herself*, perceiving it as two competing voices in her mind. While imagining herself presenting, she heard the negative voice (i.e., anxious, timid, insecure) uttering phrases such as, *"I'm nervous, oh no, my hands are shaking, I'm sweating, I'm scared. What was I going to say? Can I even speak English?"* In response, the positive voice (i.e., encouraging, optimistic) reassured her by saying, *"Come on, E [initial of learner's Christian name], it will work out. You prepared a lot, chose an interesting topic; it will work out"* (#13). In addition to the physical manifestations of anxiety and lack of confidence in presenting in the TL, the anxious voice also expressed discomfort due to *"being stared at"* and concerns about the audience's reaction (*"I'm afraid of how classmates will react, what they will think about me as the presenter"*); however, thanks to the positive voice, she also envisioned herself *excited and enthusiastic*, eager to showcase what she had prepared for the presentation. This example aptly illustrates the typical images respondents in this category envisioned when picturing themselves, with feelings of anxiety hand in hand with positive thoughts and emotions.

The positive feelings emerging alongside anxiety were related to the following factors: (1) the discussed topic, (2) familiarity with audience members, (3) presenting with a partner, and (4) being well-prepared. Positive feelings related to the presentation topic included *"talking about what truly interests" them or what they "love"* (#11); topics they *"can feel deeply about"* and *"immerse themselves in"* (#22). Evidently, it was the self-chosen topic that respondents felt genuinely interested in and passionate about that produced positive feelings, making them feel more at ease in the otherwise uncomfortable situation. As one participant put it: *"I feel anxious, I don't particularly enjoy public speaking, but the topic improves the feeling"* (#12).

The second source of positive feelings that emerged in respondents' minds was their familiarity and good rapport with the audience. In the imagined scenario of presenting in the classroom, *"familiar faces"* (#19) or *"kind people"* (#15) appeared before their eyes, *boosting their confidence*, and making them feel *less nervous*. The following quote nicely reflects the dynamics of anxiety and the audience effect during the visualized presentation:

"As I close my eyes, I feel tense because I don't enjoy speaking in front of a large audience without having a two-way conversation. However, I know who my classmates are, and I

don't feel worried because I know they won't judge me. Everyone in the group is very kind, and I know that they would applaud even if I were to make a big mistake or things didn't go as planned. So, I visualize the group in front of me, and I don't worry about being judged. If someone is smiling, or just looking interested, or not interested in the topic but still following the presentation, it helps me because I know I'm doing well, and it releases my inhibitions.” (#20)

Besides a non-judging and attentive audience, another factor contributing to positive feelings in respondents' visualisations was presenting with a partner rather than alone. One of the predominant feelings reported was: *“I would feel much more uncomfortable if I were alone”* (#23). The mere presence of a classmate by their side was perceived to evoke positive feelings of sharing the spotlight, feeling less exposed, more relaxed, confident, and optimistic about the outcome. Sample excerpts:

“I see myself nervous in this situation. However, it's reassuring that I have F [initial of learner's Christian name] with me, and we are speaking together about our interesting topic. That's why I can imagine us standing at the board with a smile.” (#21)

“I feel anxiety, but since I am presenting with a friend, I feel confident, and I can see that the presentation will go smoothly.” (#23)

Likewise, feeling well-prepared was also an important factor in transforming the anxiety-provoking situation into a more positive emotional experience. Good knowledge of the chosen topic and careful preparation were perceived by respondents to elicit positive feelings of *confidence, calmness, and contentment* during the visualisation process, as shown by the following quotes: *“I'm nervous, but at the same time confident. My confidence doesn't stem from arrogance or something like that but rather from being well-prepared”* (25 #); *“I feel stressed, but at the same time, I also feel confident. It gives me peace of mind knowing that I have prepared well”* (#8).

Besides the sources of positive feelings and emotions, responses in this category have unveiled two more interesting findings, contributing to a better understanding of the co-existence and dynamics of anxiety and positive affect in participants' visualisations. One finding is that anxiety was not perceived by respondents to be constant throughout the entire imagined presentation. It was felt to be at its peak and most intense immediately before starting and in the first one or two minutes of the talk, manifesting in *“trembling hands and legs”* (#13) and *“speaking hesitantly and quietly”* (#23). However, as participants started to *“become accustomed to being the centre of attention for the entire class”* (#7), they began to *“feel better and less nervous”* (#7). In other words, anxiety was felt to gradually dissipate as the presentation progressed, giving way to other, more positive feelings, such as feeling comfortable, enthusiastic, confident, satisfied, and joyful, as aptly shown by the following excerpt:

“When I imagine myself presenting, I see that although I’m nervous, especially at the beginning, I will still be able to deliver the presentation confidently and interestingly. When I start, nervousness, confusion, and anxiety dominate. But after a few minutes, I’m starting to immerse myself in my topic, I’m slowly feeling comfortable in the role of the presenter, and good thoughts come to my mind. I get into the flow to the point where the nervousness fades away, allowing me to fully engage with the topic and speak about it enthusiastically. When I feel confident about speaking to the group, I feel satisfaction and joy.” (#27)

Another important finding emerging from the visualisations in this category was that some participants envisioned themselves feeling less anxious during the imagined presentation compared to past real presentations. This perception led them to experience positive emotions, such as joy, satisfaction, pride, and hope, as shown by the following quotes:

“I see myself feeling stress because I have to speak in front of people, which I don’t like. However, I also feel that I have grown a lot since starting university, and I handle this situation much better and more calmly now.” (#8)

“I feel that perhaps I’m slightly more confident than previously I had to present. I believe that with each occasion, I become a little better.” (#19)

6. Discussion and Conclusions

This qualitative inquiry set out to explore learners’ emotional reactions towards EFL presentations—an activity widely used at the tertiary level, yet relatively under-researched from this aspect. Although the main interest of the study was anxiety in response to L2 presentations, participants were unaware of this focus to allow for an unbiased assessment of the importance of anxiety relative to other emotions. Another unique feature of the study was its focus on learners’ emotional experiences *before* presentation, a topic hitherto unexplored in L2 research. Moreover, participants’ pre-presentation affective responses were investigated longitudinally, spanning from their first reactions to the OP assignment, through their choices of presenting individually or in pairs, until the final days leading to the scheduled talks.

As for initial reactions at the beginning of the semester (RQ1), the first important finding of the study is that only a small minority of the participants (15%) received the oral presentation requirement with positive feelings, and even then not due to task enjoyment but rather perceived usefulness of the task. In contrast, almost half of the participants (48%) responded with anxiety and other negative feelings, either exclusively (36%) or in conjunction with more positive emotions (12%). These findings substantiate the notion of anticipatory anxiety (Beatty *et al.*, 1976; Behnke and Sawyer, 1999) in the context of L2 presentations, showing that learners may experience anxiety well before the

onset of the talk— as early as when the presentation task is announced. In this study, almost every other participant automatically associated anxiety with this task, indicating that anxiety was an inherent part of their conception of an EFL presentation.

The finding that a sizeable percentage (37%) of the respondents reported feeling neutral about the OP requirement, with neither marked negative nor positive emotions, can be interpreted both as good news and as not so good, in fact. It is good news that these learners do not or no longer experience anxiety about presenting in the TL, supporting previous research on the beneficial impact of repeated exposure to OP (Gürbüz & Cabaroğlu, 2021; Tóth, 2019). On the other hand, the absence of positive emotions regarding an activity so common in the tertiary EFL classroom is concerning, as positive affect is crucial for facilitating language development and sustaining motivation for learning (cf. Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Williams *et al.*, 2015).

Participants’ appraisal of the option between individual or paired presentation and the reasons behind their choices have also proved useful in shedding light on their initial emotional responses. The results have revealed that it is a commonly held belief shared by most participants that presenting in pairs can reduce anxiety about oral presentation, making it the ideal option for students who are shy or anxious about speaking before an audience. This finding is significant, even if it is not supported by previous research, which found no substantial differences between self-rated anxiety levels of pair vs. individual presenters during actual delivery (Tóth, 2021). The result that almost two-thirds of the participants who opted for paired presentations did so because of anxiety issues indicates that students who find OP emotionally taxing believe they can gain emotional support from presenting with a partner.

In relation to the run-up to the presentation (RQ2), both the participants’ thoughts and emotions encountered in the final days preceding the talk and the visualisation task have informed the study with valuable findings. Concerning the former, the results revealed a significant increase of almost 40% in anxiety responses compared to the beginning of the semester (48% vs. 87%), resulting in 87% of the participants experiencing anxiety (with or without positive emotions) in the lead-up to the presentation. This clearly indicates that pre-presentation anxiety intensifies immediately prior to the speaking situation (cf. Behnke and Sawyer, 1999), when even learners exhibiting neutral or positive feelings towards OP may experience episodes of anxiety about the upcoming talk. In this study, this was evidenced by the complete disappearance of neutral responses and the slight decrease in those reflecting positive feelings (15% vs. 13%).

As for the visualisation task, asking learners to imagine themselves delivering their talk has proved to be an effective tool to elicit their emotional responses to the forthcoming presentation. While in the run-up to the talk, 58% of the respondents reported anxiety as the predominant emotion, only 10% of them visualised purely negative, anxiety-dominated images when imagining themselves presenting their talk. The majority (80%) saw themselves experiencing anxiety, especially at the onset of the talk, but they also envisioned positive emotions as detailed above. Participants’

visualisations have shown that anxiety and positive emotions in the context of L2 presentation stem from the same sources: learners’ conceptions or inner scripts of EFL presentation, i.e., how they view (1) the situation, (2) the audience, (3) themselves, and (4) the speech (delivery and use of the TL) (cf. Tsang, 2020, 2022 on self-perceptions). How negative or positive this inner script is, is likely to affect learners’ actual emotional experiences and behaviour when delivering L2 presentations.

To summarise, although not directly inquired about, anxiety has been found to be a prominent emotion during the pre-presentation period at all three significant events examined. It was detectable as soon as the instructor announced the presentation assignment, influenced learners’ choices of paired rather than individual presentation, and intensified in the lead-up to the talk. At the same time, few participants envisioned purely positive/anxiety-free or entirely negative/anxiety-filled scenarios (10% each) while imagining themselves delivering their talks, indicating that for most students, L2 oral presentations were associated with both anxiety and positive emotions (cf. Tóth, 2019).

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for L2 teachers:

- Address L2 presentation anxiety immediately after announcing the oral presentation task. Provide an opportunity for learners to discuss their feelings concerning OP so that they realize others might have very similar feelings. Help them identify and verbalize their fears/worries and come up with potential coping strategies (for an activity, see Tóth, 2024).
- Provide a choice between individual or paired presentations to suit everybody’s needs.
- To alleviate anxiety in the lead-up to the presentation, encourage learners to imagine a positive rather than negative scenario. Introduce them to the idea of positive visualization, whereby they envision an ideal presentation day and themselves as confident and successful speakers, following a script read out by the teacher. This can help to break the negative involuntary association between L2 presentation and anxiety, as the positive images counteract the negative ones (for an activity, see Tóth, 2024).
- Let students choose topics they are truly interested in, as this will make presenting more enjoyable and less anxiety-provoking for them.
- Use activities that help learners get to know each other better, as this will create a relaxed and accepting classroom environment, with students more supportive of each other when it comes to listening to each other’s talks.
- Strengthen learners’ awareness that with each presentation they will improve.
- Ask learners to pay special attention to the beginning of the talk when anxiety is highest.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the author

Zsuzsa Tóth is an EFL instructor and teacher trainer. She holds a PhD in Language Pedagogy (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest) and an MSc in Applied Linguistics (University of Edinburgh). Her professional interests include individual differences in L2 learning, teacher education issues and EFL teaching methodology. Her main research area is the study of foreign language anxiety. She has authored the book *Foreign Language Anxiety and the Advanced Language Learner* (Cambridge Scholars).

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