

Overcoming Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

(Part 4: Feedback Analysis)

外国語不安の克服 (4)

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This article presents key findings from a study examining undergraduate students' responses to oral presentations designed to reduce foreign language anxiety. Following the English-language presentations, students submitted detailed written survey feedback on their experiences. Analysis of anonymised responses from 30 participants identified primary sources and characteristics of anxiety, such as fear of negative judgment, concern about making mistakes, and prior negative experiences (See Appendix). These data reveal common patterns of anxiety and inform strategies to better support students experiencing foreign language anxiety. Nevertheless, the results are based on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias or inaccurate recall. Furthermore, the small, homogenous sample of 30 students from a single institution limits the generalisability of these findings to other Japanese university students, the results should therefore be interpreted with caution. Future research should employ larger, more diverse samples and incorporate additional methods, such as interviews and performance reviews, to enhance reliability and validity.

Building on a previous investigation (Overcoming Foreign Language (FLA) Part 1, 2 & 3) that employed the PREP framework for oral presentations, it is evident that, despite positive student responses, there remains considerable scope to advance understanding of and support for individuals experiencing foreign language anxiety. The principal advantage of the PREP approach is that it provides a clear and repeatable method for organising ideas, helping students structure their responses logically and confidently. By using the four steps—Point, Reason, Example/Expansion, and Point—students can communicate more coherently and without relying on memorisation, recognising that authentic communication occurs spontaneously and not all responses can be pre-learned. Simple English is encouraged to express ideas clearly.

Memorisation remains a prevalent strategy among students, largely because early learning methods prioritise rote acquisition of English vocabulary for examination purposes. As a result, while many students demonstrate substantial vocabulary knowledge, they frequently lag in communicative competence and are often unable to use English fluently, particularly in oral contexts. To explore this issue further, the next section analyses responses from 30 participants who answered questions about their feelings during English oral presentations held in mid-April 2025. These findings aim to give a clearer understanding of students' anxiety.

(A)Concerns Regarding Others' Perceptions

Eighteen respondents indicated that their anxiety is primarily attributable to concerns about others' perceptions when engaging in public speaking.

The following statements exemplify the specific sources of anxiety experienced by these participants:

- Feeling as though they may be ridiculed by the audience
- Perceiving judgment from audience members
- Experiencing heightened scrutiny from the audience
- Worrying about failing to meet the audience's expectations
- Concern regarding the audience's level of interest in the presentation content
- Anxiety related to perceived judgments regarding English language proficiency
- Concern about effectively conveying information to facilitate audience comprehension

Respondents indicated that concerns regarding others' perceptions significantly heightened their anxiety. This finding might suggest that the pronounced homogeneity of Japanese society, coupled with a strong tendency for individuals to conform to group norms, amplifies anxiety associated with expressing personal ideas in group settings. Notably, this effect is particularly pronounced in foreign-language contexts. Furthermore, several respondents explicitly attributed their fear of ridicule or negative evaluation to adverse experiences in school, noting that these anxieties may persist into university.

(B)Worrying about making mistakes

Eleven respondents said fear of making mistakes is their main source of anxiety in using a foreign language. This fear, common among Japanese students, is often linked to their personalities. Despite encouragement to overcome it, many still avoid using English for fear of making errors in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and other aspects of language.

(C)Previous Experience

Analysis of respondent feedback showed six individuals linked their anxiety to prior school experiences. While it is widely accepted that past experiences influence current behaviour, this highlights a dimension requiring further investigation. Respondents used terms like "traumatic experience," "embarrassing experience," "trauma," "bad memories," and "keep returning" to describe the impact, emphasising the seriousness of their concerns. Respondents reported that their specific encounters with English resulted in persistent adverse outcomes. Such experiences contributed to significant anxiety and stress, frequently leading to the avoidance of English language use. Responses from these six participants suggest that adverse English-related experiences, such as public ridicule in school, have had a long-term impact. Such experiences have contributed to a sustained fear and reluctance to engage in English communication. A key question from this data is how to help these students learn from the past without

letting bad experiences block their progress in learning English.

(D)Comparison with Peers

In addition to past experiences as a source of anxiety, another factor identified was the inclination to compare oneself with peers. Five respondents reported that observing classmates who demonstrated higher levels of English proficiency increased their own feelings of anxiety. This pattern of comparison heightened nervousness during classroom activities and often impeded their ability to communicate ideas effectively.

(E)Concerns Regarding English Language Accuracy

Twelve respondents felt nervous using English because of perceived weak language skills. They lacked confidence due to limited vocabulary, difficulty with language, forgetfulness with grammar, and pronunciation issues. These worries increased concern about speaking accurately in presentations.

(F)Preparation as a Factor in Oral Presentation Anxiety

Four respondents identified a correlation between their presentation anxiety and their level of preparation. Some participants reported heightened anxiety attributable to inadequate preparation, while others experienced stress stemming from the considerable time and effort required for detailed preparation.

(G)Public Speaking Anxiety

Eleven respondents reported increased nervousness when speaking before an audience, which heightened their anxiety during English-language presentations.

(H)Physiological Responses to Anxiety

Sixteen respondents reported obvious physical symptoms, such as speaking too fast, sweaty or shaking hands, avoiding eye contact, and forgetting what to say during presentations.

A minority of respondents reported additional sources of anxiety, including concern about individual grades, fear of negatively influencing group performance, and worry over their ability to answer audience questions.

Conclusion

This study identified several main sources of foreign language anxiety among Japanese university students during English oral presentations: concerns about others' perceptions, fear of making mistakes, negative past experiences, peer comparison, lack of language confidence, and inadequate

preparation. Even with structured approaches like PREP, students continue to struggle with public speaking and English use, showing that cultural, psychological, and language factors all shape students' communication experiences. The persistence of anxiety, even for students with large vocabularies or extensive lessons, shows the need for teaching methods that address emotional and cultural elements, not just language skills. Effective approaches should combine emotional support, real opportunities to use English, and encouragement to view mistakes as part of learning, helping students gain confidence and improve their communication. Future research should continue to investigate evidence-based methods for reducing foreign language anxiety and enhancing oral communication skills to help students feel less anxious and speak English more easily. These continuing efforts are key to giving learners the skills they need for today's global world.

Appendix

12 responses taken from 30 response data

When I'm asked to give an oral presentation, I would say that I often feel nervous and afraid of making mistakes. Speaking in front of people makes me worry that what I want to say and not able to answer the questions properly. Even if I prepared something for presentation, I easily get stressed and anxious. I have an experience why I get to feel like that. When I was a 1st year student at university, I had the opportunity to take an oral presentation in front of so many people. It was my first time doing something like that, so I was so nervous. Sadly I totally forgot what I had to say in the last part of presentation. At that moment, I felt as if some audiences were laughing at my mistakes. I'm sure they didn't do that but it felt that way to me. This experience left a big impression on me and gave me even more afraid of speaking in public. Because of this, I still have nervousness before oral presentation. However I know it is that how should I overcome with more confident and practice. So I currently try to not get worried even if I make mistakes in an oral presentation. R1

Past experience

I think when I presentation, it makes me nervous. This is because, I always think my presentation preparing is not enough. For example, if I do the presentation about ever known, I have to research about detail. But, this research will not come the end. In now, we can research on the internet. Information on the internet is various. If I spend many time to research, I can't research all of them. If listener is not professional of this, I can say this presentation is success. But if listener is professional of this, I can't say this presentation is success. In most case, we can't do the success presentation. So, I think I can't do the complete presentation every time. Also, in the presentation, we think how to tell the listener and think the telling step. If I presentate to tell the most important thing first, it makes different emotion when I say the most important thing in the middle or final. So, each of this makes different emotion to listener. If I do the best presentation what I think, listener don't think it is the best presentation. Listener maybe think that other presentation way is the best. It can't prevent in the presentation. So, our presentation preparing always is not enough. Therefore I think when I presentation, it makes me nervous. R2

insufficient preparation

When I have an oral presentation, I feel nervous almost time. Actually, I really felt nervous when I have an oral presentation last week. But, when I have to conduct mock class, I feel more nervous. I'm taking English teacher license course in my university and I often conduct a mock class in my class. Especially, I always feel nervous when I conduct mock class in front of the audience. Because I'm not confidence about my English, and I feel everyone look at me. In mock class, I have to speak all English. I was very impatient my English doesn't come out. Also, I'm so scary what I attract attention. When I feel nervous, I'm starting to sweat my hands. I'm going to talk too fast, and sometimes my brain goes blank. When they happen, I get impatient and fail the presentation or mock class. This is my bad habit, but it cause of my personality which is shy. That's why, I feel nervous when I have an oral presentation, especially when I conduct mock class. However I have to practice teaching in high school next week, so recently, I try to practice more and more everyday. I believe practicing is most important to I'm not going to feel nervous when I conduct mock class and oral presentation. R3

I felt very nervous when I was asked to give an oral presentation. I have three reasons why I feel so. First, I do not like speaking in public. I have experienced my mind go blank during a presentation before. So, I do not want to feel same feelings. Second, making good Power Point slides are little difficult for me because I do not have a good sense. I think oral presentation needs not only speaking but also visual contents. This is because it is easy for the audience to understand oral presentation. So, I tried to make good Power Point slides as I can. For example, I used a lot of pictures and photos to understand easily. Also, I used colors for important parts. I think this effect gives an impact to the audience. Third, I was worried about whether the audience would be interested in my oral presentation theme. If my research for my oral presentation theme was not enough, the audience would feel shock. Therefore, I tried to research for my oral presentation theme deeply and I tried to communicate in my own words using simple English. For these reasons, I felt very nervous when I was asked to give an oral presentation. R4

I think I feel nervous when I was asked to give an oral presentation. Because I have three reasons why I feel nervous in oral presentation. First, I lack of my vocabulary and grammar rules, so I can't speak English fully fluently. Second, I lack my confidence when I speak English in public. Third, I fear of being judged my English is not good to someone. For example, I felt nervous when I give a presentation in this class. I trembled my voice and I couldn't present well when I give an English presentation because of my English skills is not high levels, and I can't built my boost self-confidence at that time. Additionally, I also feel nervous when I can't explain my opinions and answering questions. I sometimes can't hear questions properly, so I can't answer the question. In addition, when I answer the question, I don't know whether I can use correct English, so I'm worried about what other think my grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. That's why I feel nervous when I was asked to give an oral presentation because of lack of my vocabulary and grammar rules, lack my confidence, and fear of being judged my English is not good in someone.

R5

When I am asked to give an oral presentation, I feel nervous. This is because I'm afraid that if I speak in front of a public, I will make mistakes or forget the main points. Also, the bad experience is traumatic, and I am worried that I will fail again every time I make a presentation. For example, I've had a bad experience with English presentations. When I was a high school student, I had to speak in English in public. I had learned to speak English and thought this presentation would be easy. I had always used English and thought that careful preparation was not necessary. Therefore I did not prepare or practice enough. Then, in the English presentation, I couldn't speak English at all as well as I thought I could. Because of this I ended up not understanding the content. I was embarrassed in front of teachers and students. I decided to prepare more than usual when I have English presentations because I don't like to have this kind of experience. But this bad experience has stayed with me and I still get nervous before a presentation.

R6

So, When I am asked to give an oral presentation, I feel nervous.

I was worried about oral presentation in English. There are two reason. First, I am not good at speaking English, so I was worried about using correct expressions. For example, if I use uncorrected words or expressions, my grades will be lower than now. When I was 9th grade, I used uncorrected grammar in English classes. After that, my grade was 4/5. I don't think this cause is using uncorrected grammar, but I became afraid that use uncorrected expressions in the English class. And second, I don't like preparing presentations. I become to prepare hard and politely if I need to prepare a presentation. Because I don't want to present incomplete one. So, It takes a lot of time to prepare for a presentation. For example, when I was 3rd grade student in Jissen Women's University, it takes 15 hours to prepare for the presentation in the class. That class was my major's class, so failure is not allowed. And then, I costed a lot of time to prepare the presentation. Therefore I was worried about oral presentation in English when I was asked to give an oral presentation. There are aspects of corrected expressions or grammar in English, and I don't like to take a time for preparing for the presentation.

R7

When I do the oral presentation I feel nervous. Some times my voice become shaky. This is because when I was the junior high school student, I did presentation in English class. The subject was "my favorite sport player" but I don't have favorite sport player. So I spoke about an athlete with no emotional attachment. And I didn't research about him at all. So, I couldn't speak about him well. This is because bad memory for me like a trauma. I don't want to do that again then when I have a opportunity do the presentation I spend research much time and focus to prepare the presentation. But, I stand in front of the people my bad memory was comeback. So, when I do the Oral presentation I feel so nervous. But recently I feels confidence of my presentation. That way I think I spend prepare the presentation, and I have a experience presentation many times. So, I think I have to get more opportunity to do the presentation while I am a student. And I believe it is the good for me when will I become working adult. I would like to get more good skills and practice pronounce and grammar for my step up.

R8

When I was asked to give an oral presentation, I was feeling a mixture of anxiety, nervousness, and enjoyment. This is because I am nervous about speaking in front of large groups of people and I am not good at it, but I really like speaking English. I also like to create attractive slides in PowerPoint and deliver my thoughts to others. Examples of anxiety and nervousness is when I accept an assignment and have to speak in front of a lot of audience. I get nervous because I feel many people looking at me. On the other hand, an example of what makes speaking English fun is that speaking English is that it has become a part of my daily life. That is I have been living in an international exchange share house since I entered university. There are about 10 people at my place about half of whom are foreign residents, so daily conversation is in the house in English. Therefore there is not much resistance to speaking English. Also I lived and worked in Australia for about a year, which gave me confidence in my English skills. In addition, giving an oral presentation also plays a role in improving skills such as making visually slides and speaking in English in front of others. These are some of the reasons why when I was asked to give an oral presentation, I was feeling a mixture of anxiety, nervousness and enjoyment.

R9

I think I feel nervous when I was asked to give an oral presentation. This is because, I can not have confidence of my preparation and my English speaking skills. For example, previous oral presentation about critical thinking is very difficult to understand what about critical thinking and I don't have any good idea about how to make everyone easy to understand about critical thinking. They are made me confusing and feel uncomfortable. So, I can not get confidence about my preparation for previous oral presentation. In addition, I think it is difficult for me to speak correctly and pronounce in English. I think my classmates can speak English more fluently and have better skills than me. This is because, their pronunciations are good, oral presentations are easy to understand and their answer is clearly. For example, when teacher asked us read some slide, everyone read smoothly, and when asked some question, everyone answered quickly and logically. Thus, I think my classmates can speak English more fluently and have better skills than me. So, I feel shy when I speak English in front of everyone and I can not have confidence about my English skills and pronounsations. Therefore, I think I feel nervous when I was asked to give an oral presentation.

R10

I feel nervous when I was asked to give an oral presentation. This is because I do not like to speak in front of an audience. If I am good at speaking English, I will feel happy and excited. In addition, I will be able to conduct presentation very well if I know about how to make presentation. For example, when I am given a theme, I must think about theme I can explain. It is easy for me to decide theme I can explain topic I like. By doing so, I think my motivation increase and I feel fantasy through oral presentation. It connects to feeling of happy and excited and will help me give a significant advantage in careers in future. Then, I will feel not only nervous but also I will boost self-confidence, and autonomy when I were asked to give an oral presentation. If I have feeling of positive against an oral presentation, I will be able to speak in front of audience and make me grow up successfully, greatly or I am liked by everyone or I will be a good English speaker in the future. So, I feel nervous when I was asked to give an oral presentation.

R11

I think oral presentation makes me feel scary and nervous. But I also think that I make good presentation! Firstly, one reason why I feel scary, this is because I am not good at presentation. For example, it is different that presentation in high school or presentation in college. Especially, presentation in college is more need logic and explaining in detail than presentation in high school. Additional, we also are careful PowerPoint slide design. So I think oral presentation makes me feel difficult and being unbalanced. I feel scary. Secondly, another reason why I feel nervous, this is because I don't like out of audience. I think that if I wrong anything when speaking in public, if I says strange anything when speaking in public. For example, Oral presentation and Speaking my opinion and so on. So, I think Oral presentation makes me feel nervous. But I also has positive motivation. It is giving that oral presentation, I think that I try the best! This is because in the future, I think it is important and useful to Presentation skill. So I want to up my presentation skill and I want to know improvement point. In this class, It is good environment that practicing and improving presentation skill.

R12

Important
for future