LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network
ISSN: 2630-0672 (Print) | ISSN: 2672-9431 (Online)
Volume: 19, No: 1, January – June 2026

Language Institute, Thammasat University
https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/LEARN/index

Mapping Out the Importance-Difficulty Matrix: Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of English Oral Presentation Skills

Valaikorn Charoensuk

valaikorn.c@arts.kmutnb.ac.th, Faculty of Applied Arts, King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok, Thailand

APA Citation:
Charoensuk, V. (2026). Mapping out the importance-difficulty matrix: Students' and teachers' perceptions of English oral presentation skills. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, *19*(1), 40-63. https://doi.org/10.70730/KLTG1393

Received
13/03/2025

Received in revised form
14/08/2025

Accepted
15/09/2025

ABSTRACT

The importance-difficulty matrix, a strategic business planning tool, could enhance course design and optimize resource allocation in an English course where university teachers face time constraints while balancing competing objectives. Therefore, this study aimed 1) to examine students' perceptions of the difficulty associated with English oral presentation skills; 2) to investigate teachers' perceptions of the importance of these skills; and 3) to examine how English oral presentation skills are positioned on the importance-difficulty matrix. The participants were 374 undergraduate EFL students enrolled in an English oral presentation course and 14 instructors from a Thai university. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were utilized for the data collection. Descriptive statistics, specifically mean and standard deviation, were employed in order to analyze the questionnaire data, while the interview data were examined to support these statistics. The overall results indicated the following: 1) the students perceived vocal delivery as the most challenging skill; 2) the instructors viewed the story message as the most important skill; and 3) all four main skills of English oral presentations were placed in the first quadrant of the matrix, reflecting high importance and low difficulty.

The findings hold practical implications for further development of an oral presentation course within an EFL undergraduate context.

Keywords: students' perceptions, teachers' perceptions, English oral presentation skills, importance-difficulty matrix, EFL undergraduates

Introduction

The ability to express ideas clearly and convincingly is essential for meaningful engagement in higher education and the modern workplace in the 21st century (Das & Lakshmi, 2023). As a result, English oral presentations have become a key component of tertiary English as a foreign language (EFL) programs, appreciated for their ability to promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Iqbal et al., 2019). More importantly, they provide a unique teaching environment where learners can improve their overall communicative ability by combining multiple language skills in a purposeful activity (Tsang, 2020).

Despite its pedagogical importance, there is often a gap between the goals of English oral presentation (EOP) instruction and its practical implementation. On one hand, EFL students frequently struggle with the complex demands of giving presentations in a foreign language. They have to face issues related to language skills, presentation techniques, and anxiety (Iqbal et al., 2019). On the other hand, instructors face their own significant limitations. This is especially true in settings like Thai universities, where large, mixed-proficiency classes and limited teaching hours are common. For these teachers, the complexity of EOP skills, which include everything from organizing content and making evidence-based arguments to vocal delivery and visual design (LeBeau, 2021), poses a significant teaching challenge; that is, how to deliver effective, comprehensive instruction when time and resources are limited.

This dilemma often results in instructional trade-offs. Without a systematic framework for prioritizing learning goals, teaching can become disorganized, spreading limited time too thin across many skills or relying on a one-size-fits-all strategy. These methods risk being inefficient, possibly overemphasizing skills that students find easier while overlooking those that they find harder. What is needed is a diagnostic approach that helps educators make strategic, evidence-based decisions about where to concentrate their teaching effort for the greatest effect.

In order to address this challenge, this study proposes the application of the importance-difficulty matrix (IDM). The IDM is a framework traditionally used in project management to guide strategic decision-making (Entrision, 2021). The logic of the IDM is to focus resources not uniformly, but on areas that are simultaneously high in importance and high in difficulty (Hewlett Packard Enterprise, 2025). While applied in fields such as business (Godeiro et al., 2018) and public health (Resnicow et al., 2017), its potential as a tool for pedagogical needs analysis in language education remains largely unexplored.

This study, therefore, aims to implement the IDM framework within an undergraduate EOP course. By systematically mapping students' perceptions of skill difficulty against instructors' perceptions of skill importance, this research intends to provide a data-driven model for curriculum design. The primary objective is to provide educators with a practical tool that can more effectively prioritize learning outcomes, allocate instructional time, and ultimately bridge the gap between pedagogical ideals and the practical realities of teaching oral presentations in resource-constrained EFL contexts.

Research Questions

1. What are students' perceptions of the difficulty of different EOP skills?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the importance of different EOP skills?
3. How are different EOP skills positioned on the IDM?

Literature Review

Conceptualizing EOP Skills Through Communicative Competence

Effective oral presentations are a cornerstone of academic and professional success. They enable individuals to convey complex information persuasively (Changpueng & Wattanasin, 2018). In EFL settings, mastering these skills is a complex challenge that goes beyond mere language ability. In order to fully understand the components of EOP skills, this study uses the foundational model of communicative competence, initially proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) and later expanded by Canale (1983). This framework suggests that communicative ability consists of several interconnected skills. Thus, it offers a theoretically sound perspective for analyzing EOP skills.

Drawing on this model, EOP skills can be deconstructed into four key areas. First is grammatical competence. This involves the accurate use of linguistic code, including vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. For

presenters, this means constructing clear sentences and using appropriate terminology to ensure that the message is understood without ambiguity (Nguyen, 2018; Yuliansyah, 2018). Second is discourse competence. This is the ability to connect ideas logically and coherently. In an oral presentation, this manifests as a well-organized structure with a clear introduction, body, and conclusion, ensuring a logical flow that the audience can follow (Živković, 2014). It also involves the effective use of supporting evidence to substantiate claims (LeBeau, 2021).

Third is sociolinguistic competence. This refers to the ability to use language appropriately in a given social context. For presenters, this includes managing vocal delivery elements such as tone, volume, and pace in order to maintain audience engagement (Tsang, 2020), as well as non-verbal cues such as eye contact, posture, and gestures to convey confidence and connect with the audience (Nguyen, 2018). Lastly, strategic competence involves the use of communication strategies to compensate for breakdowns in communication and to enhance the effectiveness of the message. In EOPs, this includes skills such as handling audience questions, managing time effectively, and adeptly using visual aids to support rather than distract from the core message (Arwae & Soontornwipast, 2022; Živković, 2014). By framing EOP skills within this model, we move beyond a checklist of attributes to appreciate the interplay of linguistic knowledge, organizational ability, contextual appropriateness, and strategic execution that defines a successful presentation.

Perceptions of Importance and Difficulty in EOP Skill Development

In order to effectively design pedagogical interventions, it is essential to understand the perceptions of the main stakeholders: students and teachers. For this study, "perception" is operationally defined as an individual's personal interpretation and evaluation of EOP skills, influenced by their previous experiences, beliefs, goals, and the cognitive demands of the tasks (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). These perceptions are not random; they can be explained through established psychological and educational theories that clarify why specific skills are considered important or difficult.

The "importance" dimension of perception can be explained by expectancy-value theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). This theory states that a person's choices, persistence, and performance are influenced by their beliefs about how well they will do in an activity and the extent to which they value that activity. For example, teachers often prioritize skills that they see as valuable for students' future academic or career success, focusing on clear content organization and coherent delivery (Bansa, 2023; Sodiqova, 2023). Their valuation is connected to the goal of preparing students for real-world communication needs.

Conversely, the "difficulty" dimension is well-explained by cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988). This theory suggests that learning is hindered when working memory is overloaded by tasks that are too complex or unstructured. For EFL students, giving an oral presentation is a task with high intrinsic cognitive load because they must simultaneously handle linguistic encoding (fluency, pronunciation, grammar), content organization, and audience interaction (Le, 2021; Syam et al., 2024). This mental strain is often worsened by psychological factors such as presentation anxiety and low self-confidence, which deplete cognitive resources and hinder performance (Ho et al., 2023; Tareen, 2022; Zakaria et al., 2023). As a result, students often see language-related skills and content organization as the most difficult aspects of EOPs (Phan et al., 2022; Pervaiz et al., 2022).

The Pedagogical Rationale and Research Gap

A key principle of effective language curriculum design is needs analysis, which involves systematically collecting information in order to identify what a group of learners requires (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Nation & Macalister, 2019). This process is crucial for ensuring that instruction is relevant, targeted, and effective. In this context, students' perceptions of difficulty represent their "felt needs," while teachers' views on importance reflect the "target situation needs" or the skills needed for academic success.

Furthermore, this needs analysis approach is based on a constructivist view of learning, where students actively build their understanding rather than passively receive information. A key pedagogical strategy from this perspective is scaffolding, where instruction is organized in order to provide temporary support to help learners bridge the gap between their current skills and new, more complex ones (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). This strategy is especially effective for managing the cognitive load involved in challenging tasks as for example with EOPs and offers a foundation for developing differentiated instructional responses based on learners' needs.

Previous research has offered valuable but often scattered insights into perceptions of students and teachers. Many studies have documented the challenges that students encounter, consistently highlighting language proficiency, anxiety, and content organization as major obstacles (Bui et al., 2022; Gürbüz & Cabaroğlu, 2021; Mardiningrum & Ramadhani, 2022). Other studies have examined what teachers prioritize in their assessment and feedback, usually focusing on content, structure, and delivery (Bansa, 2023; Bhattacharyya, 2014; Sodiqova, 2023).

However, a significant gap remains in the literature. There appears to be no study that systematically and simultaneously compares students'

perceived difficulties with teachers' perceived importance within a single diagnostic framework. This disconnect between learners' needs and pedagogical priorities can result in a curriculum that either fails to address students' most pressing challenges or overemphasizes skills that students already find manageable. The current study aims to bridge this gap by providing a more holistic diagnosis of pedagogical needs in the EFL oral presentation classroom. By contrasting these two critical perspectives, the study seeks to offer a data-driven foundation for prioritizing instructional focus and resource allocation within a specific institutional and linguistic context.

The Importance-Difficulty Matrix as an Analytical Framework

In order to address the identified gap, this study uses the IDM as its primary analytical framework. While originating in project management, the IDM is adapted here as a diagnostic instrument for pedagogical planning, conceptually anchored in the principles discussed previously. By mapping teacher-rated importance (which reflects "target needs" informed by expectancy-value theory) against student-rated difficulty (which reflects "felt needs" explained by cognitive load theory), the IDM offers a strong framework for needs analysis. The matrix visually categorizes EOP skills into four distinct quadrants, each with different pedagogical implications, as seen below:

Essential skills (high importance, low difficulty): These components are considered essential by teachers but are relatively easy for students. They form the foundational core of instruction that must be mastered.

Critical skills (high importance, high difficulty): These components are crucial for success but pose significant challenges for students. They represent the most urgent areas for targeted pedagogical intervention and require significant scaffolding and practice.

Minor skills (low importance, low difficulty): These components are considered less essential and are easy for students. They can be addressed with minimal instructional time.

Thankless skills (low importance, high difficulty): These components are perceived as difficult by students but are not prioritized by teachers. Investing significant resources here may be inefficient; these skills may require re-evaluation in the curriculum.

By plotting the different EOP skills on this matrix, instructors can move beyond intuition and make evidence-based decisions. They can strategically prioritize learning objectives and allocate instructional resources in order to enhance students' overall oral presentation competence.

Research Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods approach, specifically an explanatory sequential design, that combined questionnaires and semi-structured interviews in order to explore both quantitative and qualitative aspects. The questionnaires assessed the perceptions of the teachers and students regarding EOP skills. The interviews then provided deeper insights into individual experiences and perspectives.

Population and Samples

Every second semester, approximately 700 undergraduate students from five faculties (applied science, architecture and design, business and industrial development, engineering, and technical education) that are not majoring in language studies, enroll in an EOP course at a public university in Thailand. This course is offered in 15 to 20 sections and is taught by 10 to 14 instructors. According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, a sample of 248 participants is recommended for a population of 700 students.

As a result, this study involved two groups of participants. The first group included 374 students (56% male and 44% female) from the five faculties mentioned earlier. These students participated voluntarily and ranged in age from 19 to 21 years. They were not first-year students, and all of them had completed two English foundation courses before enrolling in the EOP course. They had varied levels of English proficiency. The second group comprised 14 instructors (six male and eight female), four of whom were native English speakers. Their ages ranged from 33 to 65 years, with an average of 15 years of English teaching experience. Since there were only 14 instructors, it was appropriate to include all of them in the study.

Research Instruments

Questionnaires

Two online questionnaires were employed in this study. The first was designed in order to obtain students' responses regarding their perceptions of the difficulty levels of different EOP skills. This questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale ranging from very easy (1) to very difficult (5), and it was written in Thai in order to guarantee the students' comprehension. The second questionnaire aimed to gather the teachers' responses concerning their perceptions of the importance levels of various EOP skills. It similarly

utilized a five-point Likert scale ranging from very low importance (1) to very high importance (5), and it was composed in English in order to facilitate understanding among foreign respondents.

Besides the informed consent and demographic data sections, both questionnaires included four main sections with a total of 33 items. The items were adapted from the course textbook, *Speaking of speech* (LeBeau, 2021), as it provided a practical framework that aligned with the course's expected learning outcomes as well as the four communicative competences (Canale, 1983) discussed in the literature review.

The story message (SM) section, focusing on crafting a clear introduction, body, and conclusion, directly reflects discourse competence—the ability to construct a coherent and logical message. The vocal delivery (VD) and physical delivery (PD) sections, which address effective voice, confidence, and audience engagement, correspond to sociolinguistic competence, representing the appropriate use of verbal and non-verbal cues in a social context. The visual message (VM) section, which covers the design and use of slides, aligns with strategic competence, specifically the use of visual aids in order to enhance communication. Finally, grammatical competence is integrated as a foundational element across the instrument, with items in both the VD (e.g., correct pronunciation) and VM (e.g., correct writing on slides) sections. The mapping between the theoretical framework and the questionnaire sections, including the number of items for each section, is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Mapping of Communicative Competences to EOP Skill Categories

Communicative Competences	EOP Skills	No of Items
	1. Physical Delivery (PD)	
Sociolinguistic Competence	PD1: Showing confidence	5
Sociolinguistic Competence	PD2: Engaging the audience	3
	2. Vocal Delivery (VD)	
Sociolinguistic Competence	VD1: Speaking with effective voice	4
Grammatical Competence	VD2: Speaking English correctly	4
	3. Visual Message (VM)	
Strategic Competence	VM1: Designing effective slides	3
Grammatical Competence	VM2: Writing English correctly	4
Strategic Competence	VM3: Changing slides in sync	1
	4. Story Message (SM)	
Discourse Competence	SM1: Crafting the introduction	3
Discourse Competence	SM2: Crafting the body	2
Discourse Competence	SM3: Crafting the conclusion	2

Communicative Competences	EOP Skills	No of Items
Discourse Competence	SM4: Using signposting language	2
	Total	**33**

In order to establish content validity, the questionnaires first underwent a preliminary revision based on feedback from two colleagues. The refined instruments were then formally evaluated by three English language teaching (ELT) experts using the index of item-objective congruence (IOC). This two-stage validation process yielded excellent item clarity, and resulted in consensus among all three experts and a final IOC value of 1.00. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha was used as a reliability measure, yielding a coefficient of 0.84 for both questionnaires. According to George and Mallery (2003), this coefficient value is considered good.

Semi-Structured Interviews

There were two sets of open-ended interview questions: one for the students and one for the teachers. They served as prompts in order to elicit comprehensive responses from the students and teachers regarding which EOP skills they considered the most difficult or important and their rationale for these assessments. Additionally, three ELT experts reviewed all of the interview questions in order to ensure that they were not suggestive and to verify the content using the IOC index, which received a score of 1.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Before the study began, approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board from a university in Thailand. At the end of the course (week 15), online questionnaires for teachers and students were distributed via Google Forms and sent to the participants that voluntarily provided informed consent. Before the main analysis, the dataset was checked in order to verify its accuracy, and the online questionnaires were designed to ensure data quality from the beginning. All of the items were marked as 'required,' and responses were limited to the fixed 1-to-5 scale. Consequently, the final dataset contained no missing values or out-of-range errors. This made it immediately ready for statistical analysis. The data were then analyzed for means and standard deviations in order to answer the first two research questions about the students' and teachers' perceptions. Next, in order to address the third research question, the means of the EOP's four main skills and eleven sub-skills were plotted on a quadrant matrix using 3.00 as the midpoint, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The Importance-Difficulty Matrix of EOP Skills

In order to supplement the collected quantitative data, all 14 instructors that had completed the questionnaire were invited and agreed to participate in a private, semi-structured interview. Students were also invited to volunteer for these interviews; and in order to ensure representation across all teachers' classrooms, the first two student volunteers from each instructor's classes were selected. This convenient yet systematic selection process resulted in a student interview sample of 28. Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes and was conducted in Thai for the Thai interviewees and in English for the non-Thai interviewees.

In line with the study's explanatory sequential design, a qualitative analysis of the interview data was conducted specifically in order to expand on the key statistical findings from the questionnaires. After transcribing the interviews, the analysis proceeded deductively. The most important quantitative results (e.g., the skills rated highest in difficulty and importance) were first identified. Then, the interview transcripts were carefully reviewed in order to find and extract all of the participant statements that offered possible reasons, examples, or contexts for these specific statistical findings.

Results

This section presents the quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the students and teachers. The data were analyzed in order to answer the three research questions regarding the perceived difficulty, perceived importance, and the positioning of the EOP skills on the IDM. The questionnaire data from both the students and teachers, rated on a five-point

Likert scale from (1) to (5), were calculated for means and standard deviations (SD). Their perceptions of EOP skills were then interpreted in terms of difficulty and importance levels, using the evaluation criteria described below.

Mean Range	Students' Perception	Teachers' Perception
1.00-1.80	very easy (VE)	very low importance (VL)
1.81-2.60	easy (E)	low importance (L)
2.61-3.40	moderate (M)	moderate (M)
3.41-4.20	difficult (D)	high importance (H)
4.21-5.00	very difficult (VD)	very high importance (VH)

The Perceptions and Matrix of the Four Main EOP Skills

Table 2 illustrates the students' perceived difficulty levels alongside the teachers' perceived importance levels of the four main EOP skills: physical delivery, vocal delivery, visual message, and story message.

Table 2

The Perceptions of the Four Main EOP Skills

Main EOP Skills	No of Items	Students' Perceived Difficulty Level		Teachers' Perceived Importance Level	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. Physical delivery (PD)	8	2.65 (M)	0.98	4.13 (H)	0.72
2. Vocal delivery (VD)	8	2.98 (M)	0.98	4.00 (H)	0.75
3. Visual message (VM)	8	2.64 (M)	0.91	4.12 (H)	0.79
4. Story message (SM)	9	2.68 (M)	0.98	4.27 (VH)	0.73

In terms of the students' perceptions, they consistently regarded all four main EOP skills as moderately difficult. Vocal delivery was seen as the most challenging (M = 2.98, SD = 0.98), followed by story message (M = 2.68, SD = 0.98), physical delivery (M = 2.65, SD = 0.98), and visual message (M = 2.64, SD = 0.91). A student interview excerpt highlights the challenge of vocal delivery:

> "I think vocal delivery is the hardest. It's important to get both the grammar and pronunciation right. And on top of that, you have to make sure your voice sounds good too. Like using the right tone, volume, and speed. It's a lot to juggle. It's not easy to get everything to come out just right."
>
> (Student #16)

In contrast, the teachers rated all four main EOP skills as either high or very high in importance. Story message was viewed as the most important skill, with a mean score in the very high importance range (M = 4.27, SD = 0.73). Slightly lower means were observed for the other three skills: physical delivery (M = 4.13, SD = 0.72), visual message (M = 4.12, SD = 0.79), and vocal delivery (M = 4.00, SD = 0.75), which were all rated as having high importance. A teacher interview illustrates this emphasis on content and structure:

> "In my view, the story message is the foundation of any good presentation. If the content isn't solid, it doesn't matter how well you speak or how good your body language is. A good structure helps the audience understand the message. If you can organize your ideas well and give relevant content, it'll help a lot. Even if your English or body language isn't perfect."
>
> (Teacher #14)

Figure 2

Matrix of Four Main EOP Skills

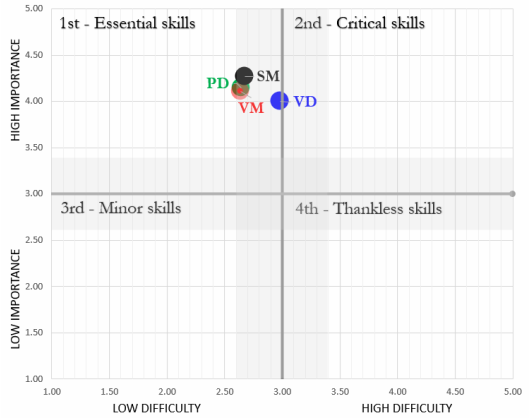

Figure 2 displays a matrix of the four primary EOP skills, plotted according to the students' perceived difficulty levels and the teachers' perceived importance levels. Utilizing 3.00 as the midpoint and the gray area to indicate the moderate range, this importance-difficulty matrix offers a visual representation of how both groups perceive these skills. All four main EOP skills—physical delivery, vocal delivery, visual message, and story message—are situated in the 'essential skills' quadrant and the vertical gray area. This indicates that they are perceived by teachers as highly important and by students as moderately difficult.

The Perceptions and Matrix of the Eleven EOP Sub-skills

Table 3 provides a detailed breakdown of the 11 EOP sub-skills categorized under the four main EOP skills (PD, VD, VM, and SM). The results show differing levels of students' perceived difficulty and teachers' perceived importance regarding the 11 sub-skills.

Table 3

Perceptions of the Eleven EOP Sub-skills

EOP Sub-skills	No of Items	Students' Perceived Difficulty Level		Teachers' Perceived Importance Level	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. Physical Delivery (PD)					
PD1: Showing confidence	5	2.57 (E)	0.97	4.24 (VH)	0.62
PD2: Engaging the audience	3	2.77 (M)	0.99	3.95 (H)	0.82
2. Vocal Delivery (VD)					
VD1: Speaking with effective voice	4	2.76 (M)	0.99	4.21 (VH)	0.68
VD2: Speaking English correctly	4	3.20 (M)	0.91	3.79 (H)	0.76
3. Visual Message (VM)					
VM1: Designing effective slides	3	2.37 (E)	0.84	3.76 (H)	0.79
VM2: Writing English correctly	4	2.89 (M)	0.90	4.45 (VH)	0.71
VM3: Changing slides in sync	1	2.43 (E)	0.86	3.86 (H)	0.53
4. Story Message (SM)					
SM1: Crafting the introduction	3	2.25 (E)	1.08	4.33 (VH)	0.69
SM2: Crafting the body	2	2.91 (M)	0.82	4.50 (VH)	0.58
SM3: Crafting the conclusion	2	2.94 (M)	0.82	4.04 (H)	0.84
SM4: Using signposting language	2	2.82 (M)	0.90	4.18 (H)	0.77

In the physical delivery category, the students found that showing confidence through appearance and posture (M = 2.57, SD = 0.97) was easier than engaging with the audience (M = 2.77, SD = 0.99) through eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions. This finding partly aligns with the previous study by Kurakan (2021), which indicated that Thai EFL engineering students perceived making eye contact as the most challenging component of EOPs. The following excerpt from the student interviews supports the perceived difficulty of these two physical delivery sub-skills:

> "I can look confident. Stand up straight, smile, dress nicely - that part I can practice. But using my hands the right way, making eye contact with a live audience - that's a lot harder. It doesn't feel natural when you're nervous. It's just awkward."
>
> (Student #12)

However, from the teachers' perspective, engaging the audience (M = 3.95, SD = 0.82) was considered less important than demonstrating confidence (M = 4.24, SD = 0.62). This may be because the teachers view confidence as a fundamental aspect of effective communication, serving as a foundation for other skills to develop, as supported by the following excerpt from the teacher interviews:

> "Honestly, I'd say confidence comes first when presenting. Eye contact, hand gestures, all those engagement skills, they're great. But if a student walks up and looks unsure, the audience tunes out before they even start talking. Confidence is like the foundation. Once that's in place, you'll be able to build everything else on top."
>
> (Teacher #8)

In terms of vocal delivery, the students viewed both sub-skills as moderately difficult. Speaking English correctly—employing accurate vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (M = 3.20, SD = 0.91)—was regarded as more challenging than speaking with an effective voice: utilizing proper pace, pitch, volume, and voice variation (M = 2.76, SD = 0.99). The following student interview illustrates their perceived challenges with these two sub-skills of vocal delivery:

> "Speaking English correctly is much harder for me than using a good voice. I'm constantly anxious that I'll say something incorrect, like with grammar or pronunciation. It's stressful. It takes more effort to get the English part right. But with voice stuff, that's easier. I feel like I can kind of fake it till I make it."
>
> (Student #20)

However, the teachers rated speaking English correctly (M = 3.79, SD = 0.76) as slightly less important than speaking with an effective voice (M = 4.21, SD = 0.68). This finding was quite surprising for the researcher, considering that all of the respondents are English language teachers. However, this may be because the respondents viewed voice elements, such as tone, pitch, and volume, as having an immediate influence on listener engagement and comprehension, and as valuable across different languages. This makes them transferable skills for students, as illustrated by this excerpt from the following teacher interview:

> "I think what you say is not as important as how you say it. People react instantly to how you say things, such as your tone and volume. When we speak with enthusiasm, everyone listens. These skills can go beyond one language. No matter what

> language our students are speaking, those vocal elements are transferred. Even with some grammatical mistakes, an effective voice can still make them sound more confident and engaging."
>
> (Teacher #5)

In the visual message category, the students found it relatively easy to design effective slides (M = 2.37, SD = 0.84) and to change slides in sync (M = 2.43, SD = 0.86). In contrast, writing English correctly was perceived as moderately difficult (M = 2.89, SD = 0.90). The teachers similarly rated writing English correctly as very important (M = 4.45, SD = 0.71), the highest among all sub-skills in this category. The following two interview excerpts illustrate the students' and teachers' perceptions of the two visual message sub-skills:

> "I use Canva a lot, and it already has so many nice templates. So, the design part is pretty easy. I just added some pictures and moved things around. But when I had to write in English, I started thinking too much. 'Is this the right word? ', 'Is my grammar okay?' I want it to sound professional, but I'm not always sure how to say things. So, designing is much easier."
>
> (Student #3)

> "I want my students to focus more on writing. Good design helps, but if the English on the slides isn't clear or correct, the message gets lost. And it shows that you're not well-prepared. On the other hand, as long as the content and language on the slides are clear and correct, the audience will still get your point, even if your pronunciation isn't perfect."
>
> (Teacher #11)

In the story message category, the students viewed crafting the introduction as the easiest sub-skill (M = 2.25, SD = 1.08) and considered crafting the conclusion the most difficult (M = 2.94, SD = 0.82). The following student interview excerpt underscores the challenges perceived with these two aspects of the story message:

> "I think the hardest part of story message is the conclusion. The introduction is not too difficult. All you have to do is to introduce yourself, your topic, and the key points. But the conclusion, that's tricky. It's tough to finish strong. You basically have to wrap everything up and make it sound important - all in just a few sentences."
>
> (Student #7)

In contrast, the teachers rated crafting the body as the most important (M = 4.50, SD = 0.58), closely followed by crafting the introduction (M =

4.33, SD = 0.69). The excerpt from the teacher interview below illustrates the perceived significance of crafting the body:

> "For me, the body of the presentation is the most crucial. That's where the main ideas are, where you really dive into the content. If the body isn't strong, the whole presentation falls apart. You have to make sure the points are clear, organized, and well supported by specific evidence. If the body isn't solid, nothing's going to save it."
>
> (Teacher #2)

These findings highlight the discrepancies between the students' perceived difficulties and the teachers' perceived importance of various EOP sub-skills. As interpreted later in the discussion section, these discrepancies can inform course design and instructional strategies.

Figure 3

Matrix of Eleven EOP Sub-skills

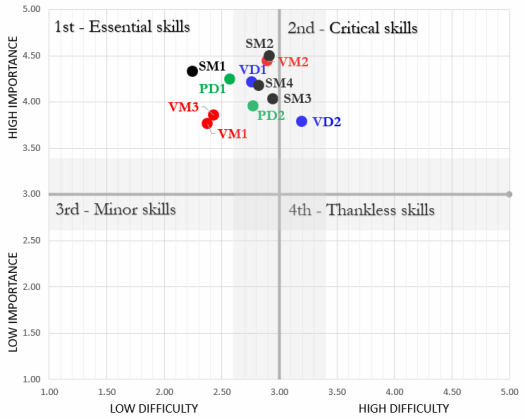

Figure 3 illustrates the matrix of the eleven EOP sub-skills and provides a more nuanced perspective on how the teachers and students perceive these specific elements. As shown in Figure 3, there is a predominance of 'essential skills,' as most sub-skills (10 out of 11) are situated in this quadrant. This indicates that they are considered very important by the teachers but reasonably under control by the students. Notably, only one sub-skill—speaking English correctly (VD2)—is categorized under the 'critical skills' quadrant. This indicates a need for focused attention or extra support because of its significant importance and difficulty.

Discussion

This section critically interprets the findings by connecting them to the theoretical frameworks outlined in the literature review. It addresses the perception gaps between the students and teachers and discusses the pedagogical implications for EOP instruction.

Interpreting the Perception Gaps Through Theoretical Lenses

A key finding of this study is the notable difference between the students' and teachers' perceptions. While the teachers focused on the story message (content and structure), the students saw the vocal delivery (linguistic accuracy and voice control) as their biggest challenge. This difference can be understood through the theoretical lenses of expectancy-value theory and cognitive load theory.

The teachers' emphasis on the story message aligns with expectancy-value theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Their high rating for this skill (M = 4.27) reflects its high "utility value." As experienced educators, they recognize that strong discourse competence—the ability to craft a coherent and logical message—is the most crucial component for successful communication in future academic and professional contexts. This finding echoes prior research stressing the importance of content and organization (Bansa, 2023; Sodiqova, 2023; Živković, 2014), but it extends this by providing a theoretical basis for this pedagogical focus. The story message serves as the vehicle for meaning, without which other delivery skills have little impact.

Conversely, the students' focus on the difficulty of vocal delivery (M = 2.98) is best explained by cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988). For an EFL learner, speaking in real time involves a significant intrinsic cognitive load. They must simultaneously 1) handle linguistic elements such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (grammatical competence), 2) monitor their voice, including pace, volume, and tone (sociolinguistic competence), and 3) manage performance anxiety. This high cognitive demand makes the skill seem overwhelmingly difficult, aligning with many studies on EFL learners' challenges (Bui et al., 2022; Le, 2021; Syam et al., 2024; Tareen, 2022). While past research identified this difficulty, this study contrasts it with teacher priorities, highlighting a key tension in the EOP classroom. That is, students are most concerned with the skill that teachers, although still valuing it, rate as the least important among the four main components.

The Critical Skill: Deconstructing the Challenge of Speaking English Correctly

The sub-skill matrix offers more profound insight into the students' perception by identifying speaking English correctly (VD2) as the only critical skill. Its placement in the high-importance, high-difficulty quadrant highlights it as the most crucial area for teaching intervention. This confirms that the main challenge for EFL students is maintaining linguistic accuracy under the pressure of a live performance.

Interestingly, a deeper perception gap appeared here: the teachers rated writing accuracy on slides (VM2, M = 4.45) as significantly more important than speaking accuracy (VD2, M = 3.79). This seemingly counterintuitive finding in an oral presentation context can be interpreted critically. The teachers might see written errors on slides as more noticeable, permanent, and as signs of a lack of preparation or attention to detail. A typo on a slide is a fixed mistake, visible to everyone, which can harm credibility. In contrast, a spoken grammatical slip is temporary and is often seen as a natural, unavoidable part of learning a foreign language. This indicates that teachers may evaluate written and spoken accuracy through different perspectives: one of carefulness (writing) and one of fluency (speaking).

Pedagogical Implications: A Data-Driven Approach to EOP Instruction

The findings, viewed through the lens of needs analysis (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), provide a clear roadmap for EOP curriculum design. The IDM functions as a diagnostic tool, mapping students' "felt needs" (difficulties) against teachers' "target needs" (importance). First, teachers should explicitly address the perception gap. Instruction should begin by clarifying goals. Teachers should clearly explain why the story message is fundamental (its utility value) while also recognizing the high cognitive load of vocal delivery. This approach helps to align student effort with learning objectives and validates their perceived struggles.

Next, teachers should prioritize and support the development of the critical skill. Speaking English correctly (VD2) requires a focused, scaffolded approach. This does not mean going back to isolated grammar drills. Instead, it involves integrated, low-pressure practice, such as using speech recognition tools and pronunciation apps, providing regular formative feedback on short oral tasks, and engaging in activities that lower the affective filter in order to lessen cognitive load.

Finally, teachers should implement differentiated and balanced instruction. The dominance of skills in the 'essential' quadrant indicates that a holistic and balanced approach is needed. However, based on the matrix, instruction can be tailored by scaffolding content from less to more difficult components. For high-importance skills such as crafting the body (SM2) and writing English correctly (VM2), teachers should allocate substantial class time for direct instruction and guided practice. This can be done step-by-step; for instance, teachers can break down crafting the body (SM2) into outlining, then developing main points, and finally using specific evidence to support them. Likewise, as Changpueng and Wattanasin (2018) suggest in their research, teachers should create scaffolding activities that help students understand the details of each presentation segment separately.

Similarly, under the visual message, teachers can begin with the easiest sub-skill, designing effective slides (VM1), before moving on to the more challenging task of writing English correctly (VM2). Additionally, teachers can create assessment rubrics that reflect subtle differences in instructional focus. For example, while still evaluating all skills, the criteria for SM2 and VM2 might be weighted slightly more. For the skills that students find easier, such as designing effective slides (VM1) or crafting the introduction (SM1), instructors can use flipped classroom techniques or peer-teaching activities. This approach empowers students and frees up more class time to focus on more difficult skills.

In conclusion, by moving beyond a simple description of what is important or difficult, this study offers a theoretically grounded and nuanced diagnosis of EOP needs. It advocates for an instructional approach that is both comprehensive and strategically prioritized in order to target the specific points of friction between students' challenges and pedagogical goals.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study employed the IDM in order to provide a diagnostic analysis of EOP skills from the perspectives of EFL students and teachers. The findings offer direct answers to the three research questions.

1. Regarding the students' perceptions of the difficulty (RQ1), the findings show that while all four main EOP skills were seen as moderately difficult, vocal delivery—especially the sub-skill of speaking English correctly—was viewed as the most challenging part.

2. Regarding the teachers' perceptions of the importance (RQ2), the study found that the teachers considered all of the EOP skills as highly important for effective communication. However, they prioritized the story

message the most, highlighting the fundamental role of clear content and logical structure.

3. In response to how these skills are positioned on the IDM (RQ3), the matrix showed that most sub-skills fell into the 'essential skills' quadrant (high importance, low difficulty). Crucially, speaking English correctly stood out as the only 'critical skill' (high importance, high difficulty), highlighting it as the top priority for pedagogical intervention.

In synthesizing these findings, this study offers a data-driven framework that goes beyond intuition. It helps educators to identify needs and to prioritize instruction in the EOP classroom strategically.

Limitations of the Study

While this study offers valuable insights, its limitations must be recognized in order to ensure a balanced interpretation of the findings.

1. A key limitation is that the study relies on self-reported perceptions of difficulty instead of objective performance data. Students' perceptions can be influenced by subjective factors, such as self-efficacy, anxiety, or prior experience (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). This may not accurately reflect their actual presentation skills. The absence of performance-based validation means that we cannot definitively link perceived difficulty with actual skill proficiency.

2. The research was carried out at one university in Thailand. Therefore, the findings are specific to that context and might not apply to students and teachers in different institutional, cultural, or linguistic environments.

3. The teacher data might have been affected by professional bias, as instructors could have felt compelled to rate nearly all of the EOP skills as highly important. This might conceal more subtle differences in how they actually prioritize skills in their daily teaching and assessments.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several directions for future research are suggested.

1. It is essential for future research to explore the link between students' perceived difficulty and their actual presentation performance. Using objective, performance-based assessments would confirm the perception data and offer a more complete picture of students' competence.

2. Repeating this study in various educational settings is recommended in order to improve the general application of the results and to examine how cultural and language backgrounds impact the perceptions of EOP skills.

3. In order to triangulate teachers' perspectives and to reduce potential bias, future research could examine the EOP skill priorities of industry professionals or employers that routinely evaluate oral presentations in real-world settings.

4. Further investigation into why speaking English correctly stands out as the only 'critical skill' is necessary. Qualitative research examining the specific linguistic and cognitive difficulties that students encounter with this skill could help to develop more effective, targeted teaching methods.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and constructive feedback, which significantly improved the quality of the paper, especially regarding the theoretical frameworks. I also appreciate the colleagues and experts who provided valuable input and assisted in validating the research instruments.

About the Author

Valaikorn Charoensuk: A full-time lecturer at the Faculty of Applied Arts, King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok (KMUTNB), in Thailand. She received her Ph.D. in English as an International Language from Chulalongkorn University. Her current research interests include alternative assessments of language learning, oral presentation coaching, and multimodal translation.

References

Arwae, S., & Soontornwipast, K. (2022). Developing scientific oral presentation competence focusing on question-and-answer sessions of high-ability science students in Thailand. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, *15*(2), 377–411.

Bansa, Y. A. (2023). The portrait of lecturer's feedback on students' oral presentation experience from Indonesian and Nepal University. *PPSDP International Journal of Education*, *2*(2), 529-535. https://doi.org/10.59175/pijed.v2i2.155

Bhattacharyya, E. (2014). *A case study of stakeholder perceptions on communicative competence in engineering technical oral presentation* [Master's thesis, Universiti Malaya].

Bui, T. T., Huynh, T. M., Nguyen, T. M., Nguyen, T. N., & Nguyen, T. L. (2022). The difficulties in oral presentation of English-majored

juniors at Tay Do University, Vietnam. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, *7*(2), 170-216.

Canale, M. (1983). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In J. C. Richards & R. W. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication* (pp. 2–27). Longman.

Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, *1*(1), 1-47. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/I.1.1

Changpueng, P., & Wattanasin, K. (2018). The promotion of engineering students' English presentation ability using the genre-based approach. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, *26*(3), 1555-1570.

Das, T. K., & Lakshmi, D. (2023). Interplay between the Big Five personality traits and oral presentation skills: A study of non-English medium engineering undergraduates. In S. Sivakumar, K. Murugesan, & R. A. Rao (Eds.), *Prioritizing skills development for student employability* (pp. 142–162). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-7589-4.ch006

Eccles, J. S., & Wigfield, A. (2002). Motivational beliefs, values, and goals. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *53*(1), 109–132. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.53.100901.135153

Entrision. (2021, March 16). *Using an importance/difficulty matrix to prioritize effectively*. https://entrision.com/blog/importance-difficult-matrix/

Fiske, S. T., & Taylor, S. E. (1991). *Social cognition* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill.

George, D., & Mallery, P. (2003). *SPSS for Windows step by step: A simple guide and reference, 11.0 update* (4th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.

Godeiro, D. P. de O., Dantas, M. L. R., Celestino, M. dos S., & da Silva, D. C. (2018). Application of importance and performance matrix to assess the quality of services provided by business incubators. *REGEPE Entrepreneurship and Small Business Journal*, *7*(3), 1–29. https://doi.org/10.14211/regepe.v7i3.704

Gürbüz, C., & Cabaroğlu, N. (2021). EFL students' perceptions of oral presentations: Implications for motivation, language ability and speech anxiety. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, *17*(1), 600-614. https://doi.org/10.52462/JLLS.41

Hewlett Packard Enterprise. (n.d.). *Importance/difficulty matrix*. Retrieved August 13, 2025, from https://www.hpe.com/us/en/design-thinking/methods/importance-difficulty-matrix.html

Ho, H., Nguyen, L., Dang, N., & Nguyen, H. (2023). Understanding student attitudes toward delivering English oral presentations. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, *22*(3), 256-277. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.22.3.16

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centered approach*. Cambridge University Press.

Iqbal, Z., Alvi, E., & Shafi, F. (2019). Prospective teachers' perceptions of oral presentations: An exploration of challenges involved. *Pakistan Journal of Education*, *36*(2), 171-198. https://doi.org/10.30971/pje.v36i2.509

Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, *30*(3), 607-610. https://doi.org/10.1177/001316447003000308

Kurakan, P. (2021). Anxiety in English oral presentations of Thai EFL engineering students. *THAITESOL Journal*, *34*(2), 67–92.

Le, C. (2021). *A survey on difficulties in giving English presentations experienced by students at Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry (HUFI)* [Preprint]. OSF Preprints. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/xwn72

LeBeau, C. (2021). *Speaking of speech* (Premium ed.). National Geographic Learning.

Macalister, J., & Nation, I. S. P. (2019). *Language curriculum design* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429203763

Mardiningrum, A., & Ramadhani, D. R. (2022). Classroom oral presentation: Students' challenges and how they cope. *Eralingua: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Asing dan Sastra*, *6*(1), 103-119. https://doi.org/10.26858/eralingua.v6i1.28487

Nguyen, T. P. N. (2018). Factors affecting oral presentations of the second-year English majors at Hanoi University of Industry. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Education & Technology (IJARET)*, *5*(3), 39-44.

Pervaiz, A., Arshad, F., Khudad, K., & Tahir, R. (2022). An analysis of spoken proficiency during oral presentations of Pakistani ESL undergraduate students. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, *10*(1), 241–253. https://doi.org/10.52131/pjhss.2022.1001.0192

Phan, T. M. U., Nguyen, T. T. H., & Phan, T. X. D. (2022). Factors affecting oral presentation skills of English majored sophomores at Tay Do University, Vietnam. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, *7*(2), 61-97. https://doi.org/10.46827/ejel.v7i2.4217

Resnicow, K., Teixeira, P., & Williams, G. (2017). Efficient allocation of public health and behavior change resources: The "difficulty by motivation" matrix. *American Journal of Public Health*, *107*(1), 55-57. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2016.303526

Sodiqova, D. (2023). Making effective oral presentations in ESL. In *Teaching foreign languages in the context of sustainable development: Best practices,*

problems and opportunities (pp. 149-152). https://doi.org/10.37547/geo-91

Sweller, J. (1988). Cognitive load during problem solving: Effects on learning. *Cognitive Science*, *12*(2), 257–285. https://doi.org/10.1016/0364-0213(88)90023-7

Syam, F., Umar, N., Faiqoh, E., Pratiwi, W. R., & Hardianti. (2024). Vocational EFL students' challenges in English oral presentation. *International Journal of Research on English Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, *5*(2), 41–50. https://doi.org/10.30863/ijretal.v5i2.7314

Tareen, H. (2022). Investigating EFL learners' perceptions towards the difficulties in oral presentation at Kandahar University. *European Scientific Journal, ESJ*, *18*(19), 312-329.

Tsang, A. (2020). Enhancing learners' awareness of oral presentation (delivery) skills in the context of self-regulated learning. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, *21*(1), 39-50. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787417731214

Wood, D., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *17*(2), 89–100. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1976.tb00381.x

Yuliansyah, D. F. (2018). *Freshmen's difficulties and strategies in English oral presentations at the English Language Education Department* [Bachelor's thesis, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta]. UMY Repository. https://repository.umy.ac.id/bitstream/handle/123456789/23579/Naskah%20Publikasi.pdf?sequence=11&isAllowed=y

Zakaria, S. F., Rusli, R., Che Mat, N. H., & Tazijan, F. (2023). An insight to attitudes and challenges in oral presentations among university students. *European Proceedings of Educational Sciences*, *106*, 543-555. https://doi.org/10.15405/epes.23097.49

Živković, S. (2014). The importance of oral presentations for university students. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, *5*(19), 468–475. https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n19p468