



TWO HEADS BETTER THAN ONE? PAIR PRESENTATION IN THE EFL CLASSROOM – A PANACEA FOR ANXIETY?

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*“But if one more would go with me,
that means more courage and more comfort.
Two heads are better than one.”*

(The Iliad, Book 10)

Abstract:

While the role of emotions in language learning is getting more and more attention in second language research, relatively few studies have investigated emotions related to specific classroom activities. This mixed-method practitioner research examined tertiary-level EFL learners' affective reactions to a specific type of oral presentation: the pair presentation. The aim of the study was to examine whether making a classroom presentation feels to be a more positive and less anxiety-provoking experience if done in pairs rather than individually. 33 English Studies students were asked to choose a presentation partner and give a 10-20 minute joint presentation in one of their regular language development classes. Immediately after the talk, they were asked to indicate on two 10-point rating scales how pleasant/unpleasant they felt during the task and how much anxiety they experienced. Additionally, they were invited to reflect on their experiences in greater depth within 24 hours, responding to a set of open questions. The results of the study are discussed in comparison to those of an earlier investigation in the same setting, which focused on the emotional experience of individual presentation (Tóth, 2019). While the numerical findings suggest that presenting with a partner is neither less anxiety-provoking nor a substantially more positive experience, the post-task reflections show that most participants approve of the idea of pair presentation and only a minority of them prefer individual presentation. Providing insights into the complexities of learners' emotional experiences and the practicalities of how they prepared for the joint presentation, the study sheds light on these conflicting results and has important implications for language teachers.

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1. Introduction

Anyone trying to learn a foreign language would attest to the idea that *language* learning is unlike learning other subjects (Williams, 1994). This is mainly because the foreign language is not only the object of learning but at the same time a means (of communication) to achieve the learning goal. Researchers talk about “*the uniqueness of the language learning experience*”, and what they mean is that “*probably no other field of study implicates self-concept and self-expression to the degree that language study does*” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). Given that learners have to operate in a language they are not fully proficient in, they are in a vulnerable position, as “*language and self are so closely bound, if indeed they are not one and the same thing, that a perceived attack on one is an attack on the other*” (Cohen & Norst, 1989, p. 76). Also, given the social nature of FL learning, learners can perceive it as a face-threatening experience (Dörnyei, 2001; Gkonou, 2012; Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 2017; Young, 1990).

Added to this is the fact that learning a foreign language requires long-term commitment and perseverance, yet it is never complete. On the contrary, it might feel more like a never-ending process with many ups and downs. In light of all this, we can safely agree with the view that, by its very nature, language learning is an emotion-laden or emotionally charged experience, in which emotions might play an even more prominent role than in other educational contexts (Arnold, 2011; Gkonou, 2017; Simons & Smits, 2021; Williams et al., 2015; Scovel, 2000). In fact, recent empirical evidence suggests that learners experience stronger emotions, both positive and negative, in FL classes than in first language classes (Resnik & Dewaele, 2020). More specifically, they experience both higher anxiety and enjoyment in the FL context, which is attributed to “*increased emotional investment*” in learning the foreign language (Resnik & Dewaele, 2020, p. 13).

But why do emotions matter? Why are FL teachers constantly reminded of the importance of establishing a “*positive affective climate*” (Arnold, 2011, 2021) and promoting “*pleasant and supportive*” (Dörnyei, 2001), “*healthy, positive*” (Dewaele et al., 2018), “*non-threatening*” (Dewaele, 2019), “*low-stress*” (Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 2017), “*low-anxiety*” (Young, 1991, 1999) classroom environments? The answer is that emotions are not to be seen as mere “*extras*” (Oatley & Jenkins, 1996: 122); they permeate and shape the whole learning experience (Arnold, 2011, 2021; Dewaele, 2015; Williams et al., 2015). More specifically, they affect learners’ perceptions of, attitudes to and motivation for learning; influence their behaviours and strategies; and are linked to performance and achievement in the target language (TL). While positive emotions are considered to be conducive to learning: helping, facilitating the learning process; negative emotions are seen as doing just the opposite: hindering, impeding the process, preventing learners

from making the most of the learning experience and achieving their full potential (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Williams et al., 2015).

This is also supported by empirical findings. The most frequent positive emotion in the context of language learning, foreign language enjoyment, has been found to be a good predictor of perceived and actual achievement (Jin & Zhang, 2018; Li, 2019) as well as higher willingness to communicate (Dewaele, 2019). Conversely, the most frequent negative emotion, foreign language anxiety, has been consistently associated with lower levels of achievement and lower course grades (Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre, 1999, 2017). Furthermore, higher anxiety has been also linked to lower willingness to communicate (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; Dewaele, 2019; Khajavy et al., 2018; Yashima et al., 2018) and less motivation (Ushioda, 2012).

Given these findings showing a link between positive and negative emotions and language learning success, it is reasonable to suggest that foreign language teachers “*get the emotional temperature right in their classrooms*” (Resnik & Dewaele, 2020, p. 13). What is more, it is also justified that they are encouraged to check the said emotional temperature from time to time, exploring learners’ language learning experiences, specifically, their emotional reactions to different activities used in the classroom (Williams et al., 2015). Examining students’ affective responses to pair presentation in the context of university EFL classes, this study attempts to do just this.

2. Background to study

The research was motivated by the findings of an earlier study in the same university EFL setting, which focused on English Studies students’ emotional experiences of the traditional, individual classroom presentation, with special attention to anxiety (Tóth, 2019). What prompted that study was the fact that despite research suggesting that pair or small group activities make a more intimate and supportive, and thereby less anxiety-provoking environment for practising oral communication than large group or full class activities (Koch & Terrell, 1991; Price, 1991; Tóth, 2011; Young, 1990), classroom presentations – typically performed by one student in front of the whole class – are standard practice at the tertiary level, both in EFL and content classes. The results of the study showed that most participants experienced considerable anxiety when giving an oral presentation. Yet, they did not perceive the experience as negative altogether, as despite their anxiety they also experienced positive feelings and emotions while delivering their talk. Furthermore, they ultimately found this activity useful, because they believed it was a motivating and practical task, preparing them for real life situations outside the classroom and helping them gain confidence speaking in front of others. Among the main sources of anxiety, participants highlighted the asymmetrical communication situation: one student standing up in front of an audience of a whole class, all by themselves in the centre of attention, with all eyes on them. A related anxiety trigger was an abject fear of the audience, more specifically, (1) worry over classmates’ not liking the topic/finding it boring or uninteresting, (2) fear of negative judgements

because of mistakes or delivery and (3) anxiety about looking visibly anxious and thereby being found out as an anxious person.

These findings led me to hypothesise that if learners had the chance to make their presentation together with another student rather than on their own, they might feel less anxious and more positive about giving a talk in the TL. I presumed having a partner by their side would ease the tension and make the whole experience more enjoyable not only when actually delivering the speech but at all stages of the preparation. I thought brainstorming with a peer would make it easier to find a topic that is likely to be engaging for the audience, thereby reducing anxiety about not meeting classmates' expectations. I also believed sharing the job of planning, collecting and organising material, negotiating the practicalities of delivering the talk (e.g. turn-taking, visual support, etc.) and finally practising and rehearsing it together would make students more confident about both content and delivery and thereby less vulnerable to anxiety about losing face in front of classmates. The present study aims to investigate these hypotheses by (1) measuring participants' self-rated anxiety and perceived task-pleasantness in the context of an in-class pair presentation and (2) further exploring their emotional experiences of and views about this activity with the help of post-task reflections.

3. Method

3.1 Research questions

The study seeks answers to the following research questions:

- 1) Does working with a partner make students more comfortable with/less anxious about making an oral presentation in the TL?
- 2) Does making a presentation feel to be a more positive experience if done with a partner?
- 3) What do learners have to say about classroom presentation in pairs?

3.2 Participants and setting

The research was conducted at the same Hungarian university as the study the present investigation is the continuation of (Tóth, 2019). The participants were purposely selected to match the characteristics of that study's participants. They were 33 students in the second year of their English Studies BA programme, enrolled in second-year (fourth semester) language development classes in two intact groups taught by the author. In addition to field and year of study, they closely resembled the participants of the earlier study in terms of other demographic variables (gender ratio, age, years of English and proficiency level) as well. Of the 33 students, 26 were female and 7 were male, which distribution – with females outnumbering males – reflects the typical gender ratio of students enrolled in English Studies programmes in Hungary. All of the participants were of typical university age (between 20 and 24), and they had studied English for an average of 11.8 years at the time of the study. Their proficiency level was around B2+.

3.3 Procedure

The research design followed that of the earlier study (Tóth, 2019), the only difference being the type of oral presentation under scrutiny in the two investigations, i.e., individual vs. pair respectively. Participants were asked to give a 10-20 minute joint presentation with a partner in one of their regular language development classes as part of the course requirements. The presentation, as in the prior study, had to be related to one of the two broad topics dealt with in the second semester of the second-year curriculum: *Arts & Entertainment* and *Health & Lifestyles*. Students were free to decide which of the two to choose and what aspect of the given topic to explore and present to their classmates. They were also free to choose their presentation partner. To encourage peer collaboration, participants were instructed to work together on the presentation sharing all the jobs involved, such as choosing topic, collecting materials, structuring talk, designing slides, deciding who talks about what, etc.

To tap into participants' emotional experiences, like in the first study, data were collected in two stages. In the first phase, immediately on finishing the joint presentation, participants completed the two-item affective questionnaire also used in the earlier investigation (Tóth, 2019). They had to indicate on two ten-point rating scales (1) how they felt during the presentation (1 = very unpleasant, 10 = very pleasant) and (2) how much anxiety they experienced (1 = I was totally calm, 10 = I was very anxious and all but panicked).

To elicit an in-depth account of their perceptions of and feelings about the experience of making a classroom presentation with a partner, in the second phase of the study participants were invited to reflect on their experiences in a greater detail, responding to a set of open-ended questions. The reflection sheet, a modified version of the one used in the prior study, included the following questions:

- 1) How did you feel during the presentation? Describe your feelings and thoughts.
- 2) Did you experience any problem or difficulty during the talk?
- 3) Did it matter that that you had a partner by your side? Did it have any effect on how you felt?
- 4) Describe how you prepared for the presentation. Did you experience any problem or difficulty during preparation?
- 5) How did it feel to you to prepare together?
- 6) Did you rehearse the presentation? Why/why not? If yes, how?
- 7) Would you like to have similar pair presentation tasks in your language development classes? Why/why not?
- 8) Would you prefer individual presentation? Why/why not?
- 9) Is there anything else you would like to add?

Participants were requested to write up their reflections as soon as possible, until the experience was still fresh in their mind, and send them via e-mail within 24 hours.

To assess participants' self-perceived anxiety and pleasantness/unpleasantness of the experience, descriptive statistics and frequencies were used. To compare anxiety level and perceived task pleasantness during pair vs. individual presentation the independent

samples t-test was used. The post-task reflections were coded for recurring themes and analysed qualitatively (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

4. Results

4.1 Anxiety during pair vs. individual presentation

In order to establish whether working with a partner makes students more comfortable with/less anxious about giving a classroom presentation, in this section I compare participants' assessments of their anxiety level during pair presentation with those of students making their presentations on their own (Tóth, 2019). Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for self-rated anxiety during pair and individual presentation on a scale of 1-10. Surprisingly, a comparison of the results shows anxiety to be somewhat higher during pair presentation, as indicated by all three measures of central tendency.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for self-rated anxiety during pair and individual presentations

Anxiety Score	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Actual Range (Possible range)
Pair presentation	6.81	8	9	2.78	1-10 (1-10)
Individual presentation	6.51	7	7, 9	2.28	2-10 (1-10)

The distribution of anxiety scores under the two conditions (Figure 1) shows a Bell curve with a skew toward scores on the high end of the distribution in both cases, with the tail in the low anxiety section, which indicates that for most English Studies students giving a talk in the TL was a rather stressful experience under both conditions. In the sample of students presenting on their own 56.4 % rated their anxiety level higher than the sample mean (i.e. ≥ 7), while the corresponding number for those presenting with a partner was 63.7%.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of participants according to anxiety level during pair vs. individual presentation. While the proportion of students with low anxiety scores (≤ 4) was very similar under the two conditions, accounting for less than a quarter of the participants in both samples, there appears to be a noticeable difference in the ratio of students with high (≥ 8) vs. moderate anxiety (scores 5-7). While in the sample of individual presenters more students reported moderate anxiety than high, the opposite was the case with pair presenters, of whom more than half (54.6 %) rated their anxiety as high.

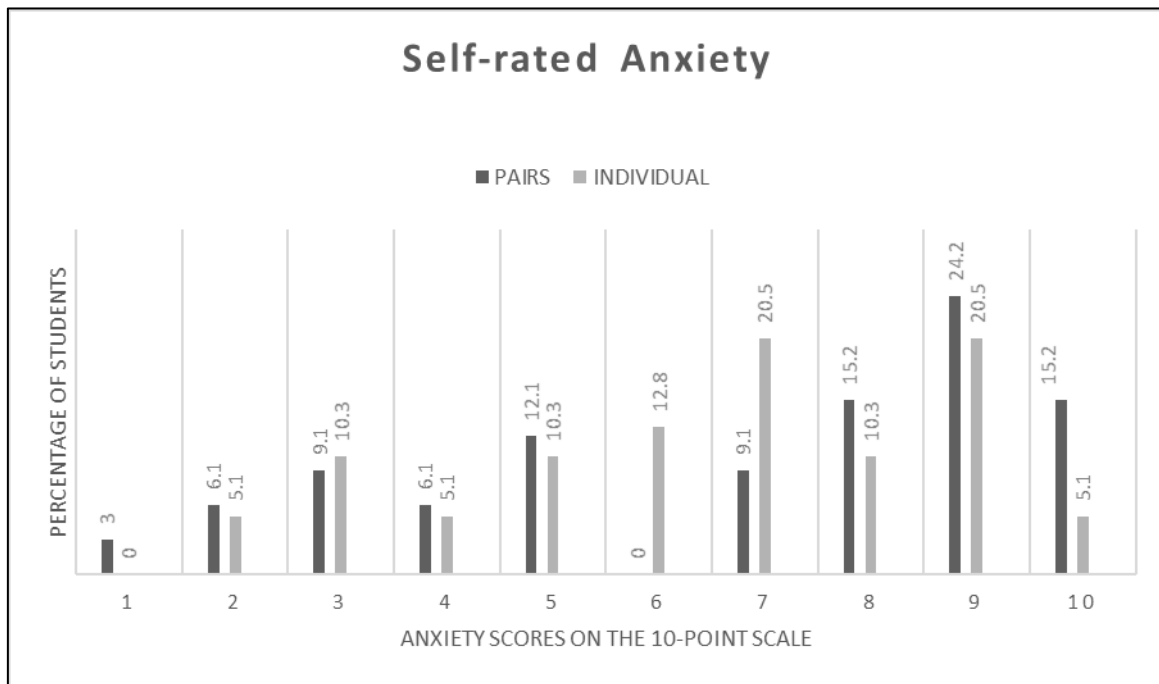


Figure 1: Distribution of participants' anxiety scores during pair and individual presentations

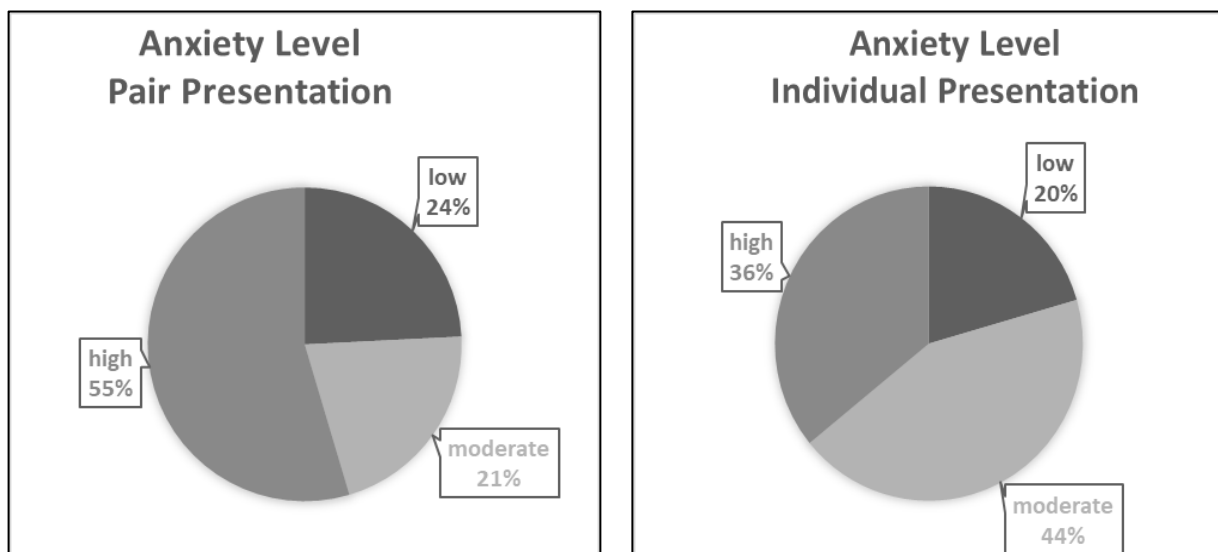


Figure 2: Distribution of participants according to self-rated anxiety level during pair and individual presentations

The high percentage of pair presenters with high anxiety (55%) and the difference between the anxiety sample means under the two conditions suggest higher anxiety during pair presentations. However, the independent-samples t-test showed that the difference between pair ($M = 6.81, SD = 2.78$) vs. individual presenters' ($M = 6.51, SD = 2.28$) anxiety level was not significant, $t(70) = -.511, p = .611$. These results suggest that making a classroom presentation with a partner did not have an effect on students' anxiety level.

4.2 Perceived task pleasantness during pair vs. individual presentation

To establish whether giving a classroom presentation feels to be a more positive experience if done with a partner, in this section I compare pair presenters' assessments of how pleasant/unpleasant they felt during the joint presentation with those of students presenting on their own (Tóth, 2019). Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for participants' ratings under the two conditions on the ten-point task pleasantness scale. As shown, the results in the two samples are strikingly similar, indicating slightly more positive experiences for individual presenters though.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for task pleasantness during pair and individual presentations

Task Pleasantness Score	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Actual Range (Possible range)
Pair presentation	6.87	7	8	2.16	1-10 (2-10)
Individual presentation	6.92	8	8	2.05	1-10 (1-10)

The distribution of ratings for pair vs. individual presentation (Figure 3) shows that in both cases most participants endorsed the high end of the scale, indicating that for them giving a classroom presentation felt to be more like a positive than a negative experience. In the case of students presenting with a partner, 66.6 % of the participants gave a higher rating than the sample mean (i.e. ≥ 7), while the corresponding number for those presenting on their own was 71.7 %.



Figure 3: Distribution of ratings on the task pleasantness scale for pair and individual presentations

Figure 4 presents the ratio of participants rating their experiences as positive (≥ 8), negative (≤ 4) and in-between the two (5-7) on the ten-point scale under the two conditions.

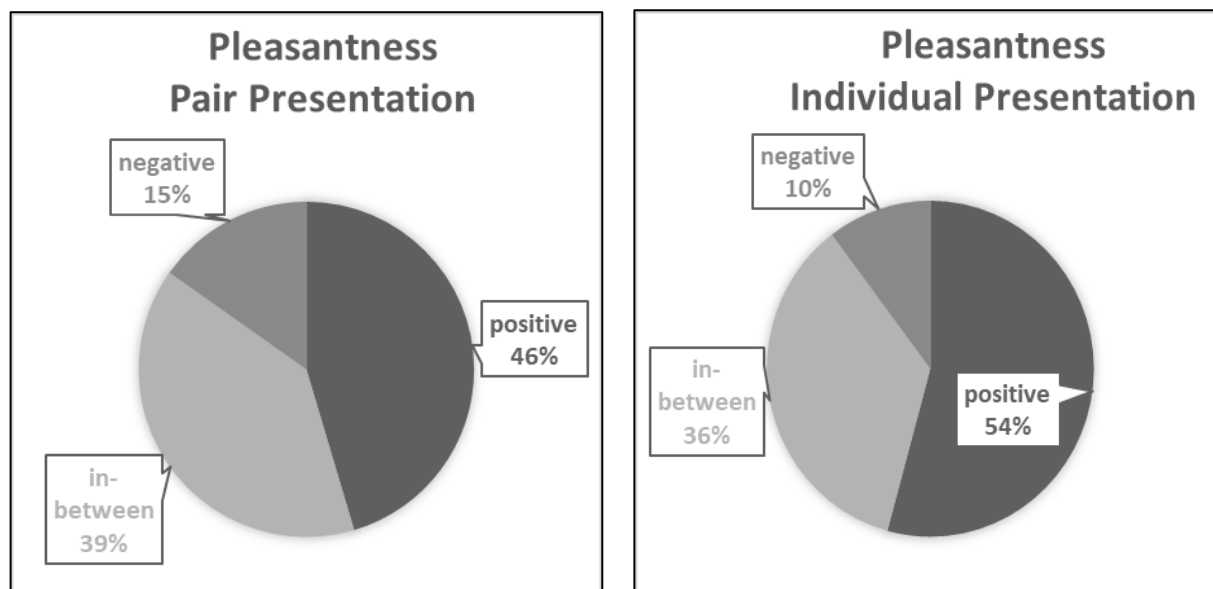


Figure 4: Distribution of participants according to ratings on the task pleasantness scale for pair and individual presentations

As shown, the proportion of students with positive/pleasant experiences was somewhat higher in the sample of individual presenters while the proportion of those with negative/unpleasant experiences lower relative to those presenting with a partner. However, the independent samples t-test showed there was not a significant difference in pair ($M = 6.87$, $SD = 2.16$) vs. individual ($M = 6.92$, $SD = 2.05$) presenters' ratings of the task pleasantness scale, $t(70) = .089$, $p = .929$. These results suggest that having a partner did not have an effect on how positive or negative experience giving a classroom presentation in the TL appeared to students.

4.3 Pair presentation in light of the post-task reflections

4.3.1 Perceived partner effect

While the statistical comparison of pair vs. individual presenters' self-rated anxiety and task pleasantness scores indicates that having a partner had no significant effect on either students' anxiety level or on how pleasant/unpleasant they felt during the presentation, the reflections of pair presenters seem to reveal a less unequivocal picture. In response to the third reflection question, asking whether making their presentation in pairs rather than on their own had any effect on how they felt during the talk, only a small proportion of answers (13%) suggested it did not, whereas the vast majority (76%) indicated that most participants felt it did (see Figure 5).

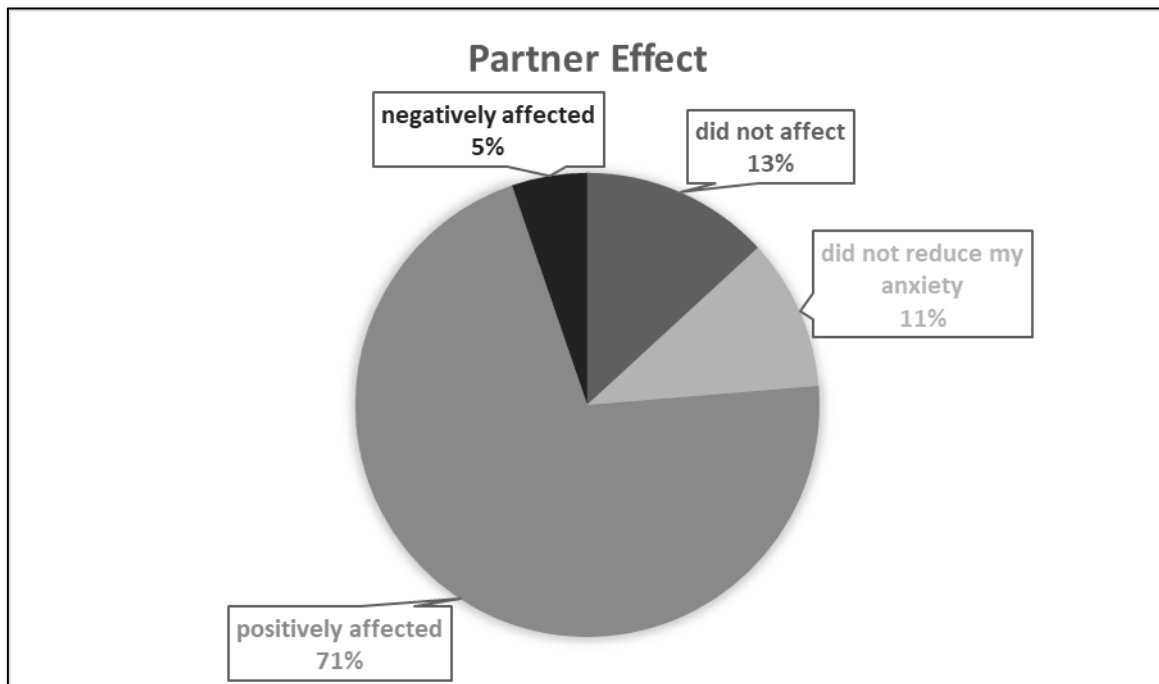


Figure 5: Participants' perceptions of how having a partner affected how they felt during the presentation

As Figure 5 shows, while most responses (71%) indicated that having a partner by their side was felt to be positive for students, a low percentage of answers (5%) showed that for some participants the opposite was the case. Students in the latter category felt their presentation would have been better/more successful if they had done it on their own, and this is what made them feel less comfortable and happy with the whole experience. As one student put this:

"Had I done it alone, it would have been more coherent and well organized. Probably, I would have said things differently, would have spent more or less time on a given slide than her [i.e. partner]. I always aim at perfection, which is not so realistic with a partner." (# 26)

Participants like this felt dissatisfied with their partner's performance, which they thought had negatively affected theirs, thereby diminishing the quality of the whole presentation. As a result, they experienced feelings of frustration and helplessness at not being able to control the situation, as shown by the following comment.

"I didn't have enough time to talk about my part as he wasn't well-prepared and focused enough. He was thinking on his feet and talked too much, leaving me less time. This made me feel frustrated. I felt I couldn't do anything, and this had a really bad effect on me and my performance as well." (# 19)

However, most participants, as evidenced by Figure 5, perceived the partner's presence as a positive influence, contributing to their feeling better during the presentation. The positive effects participants pointed to fall into four main categories, as shown in Figure 6.

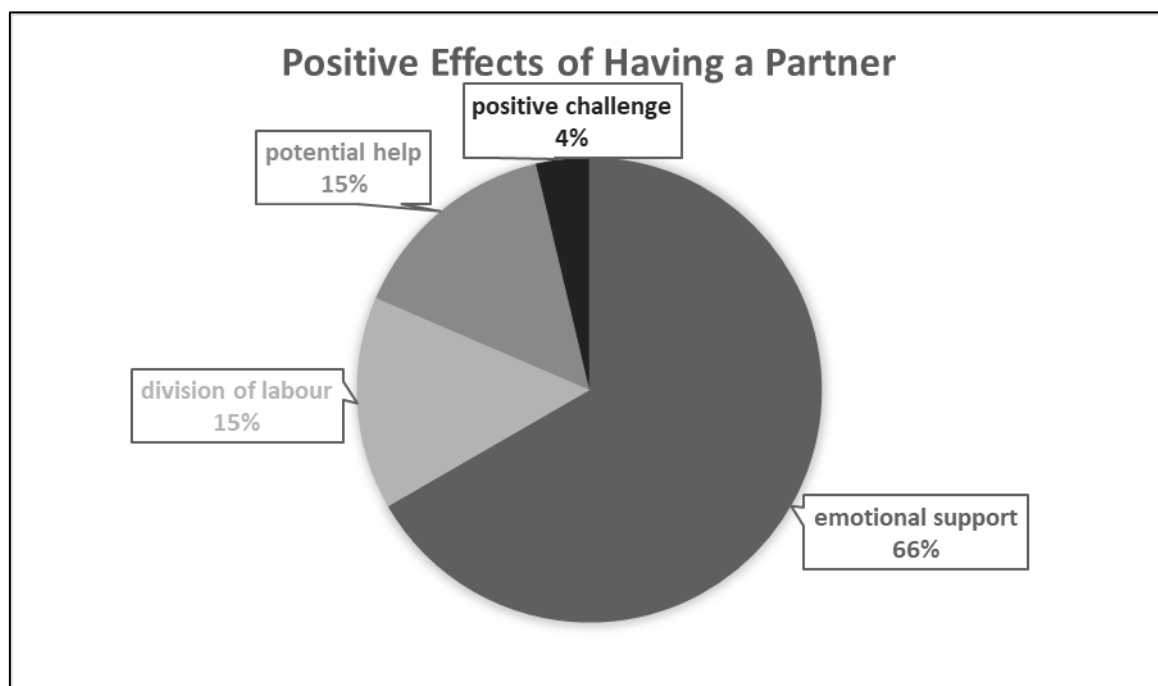


Figure 6: Participants' perceptions of the positive effects of having a partner during presentation

The largest group of responses (66%), labelled emotional support, described in what ways presenting in pairs rather than on their own made students feel better, more comfortable and confident. The most important themes emerging from participants' reflections were the following:

- partner's presence 'put me at ease'
- partner's presence was 'encouraging'/'supportive' for me
- 'I took comfort in the knowledge that I did not have to stand in front of the whole group on my own'/'it felt good I wasn't alone'/'it was comforting to have someone by my side'/'it felt better we were together, the two of us'
- 'it was easier as I wasn't the sole centre of attention'/'it wasn't just me everybody was watching'/'audience's attention was divided between me and my partner'
- it was reassuring to have someone 'to share feelings and anxieties'/'the "burden" of presentation with'
- feeling of team spirit – 'we do this project together, as a team'
- 'I felt less tense than I would have been if I had to present on my own'
- 'I felt less anxious than I would have been alone'
- 'I felt more self-confident than I would have been alone'

While most participants, as evidenced by the above ideas, had the feeling that having a partner reduced their anxiety and helped them feel more comfortable with speaking in front of the class, this was not the case with everyone. For some participants, as Figure 5 shows, having a partner did not seem to make much of a difference with regard to how anxious they felt. Sample comments:

“It [i.e. the fact that I had a partner] did not really change how I felt: I was as anxious as if I had been standing there on my own.” (# 31)

“I only felt better when it was my partner’s turn to speak. However, when it was mine, I felt very anxious.” (# 16)

As for other positive effects besides emotional support, 30% of participants’ responses mentioned perceived benefits of a more practical kind, such as, potential help from the partner (15%) and ‘division of labour’ (15%) (see Figure 6). As for the former, students pointed out that the mere knowledge of having a co-presenter by their side gave them a sense of security. They felt their partner was there for them to help in case ‘anything happened’, like, if they ‘got stuck’, ‘forgot what they wanted to say’, ‘made some mistake’, ‘could not answer questions from the audience’, or if ‘there was an unexpected problem’.

The other practical advantage respondents pointed to was the opportunity to ‘take a breather’ from time to time during the presentation thanks to sharing the job and taking turns in speaking. They felt these short breaks gave them precious time to ‘have a little rest’, ‘think their next turn over’, ‘recompose and continue’, which made the whole experience feel ‘easier’, ‘less tense’, ‘more manageable and relaxed’ than it would have been without a partner.

Finally, a small group of responses (4%) talked about how presenting with someone else turned out to be a fulfilling positive experience with many gains after the initial fear of not having full control over the talk, as shown by the following comment.

“It [i.e. presenting with a partner] was a challenge for me, as I like to have full control over a presentation. However, we reaped the rewards of our negotiation and collaboration, I think I’ve gained a lot from this experience.” (# 14)

4.3.2 Pair or individual presentation?

To have a clear idea of participants’ preferences for pair vs. individual presentation and the reasons behind, they were directly asked whether they would like to have further pair presentation tasks in the future (Reflection Q 7) or whether they would prefer presenting on their own (Reflection Q 8). Figure 7 presents respondents’ attitudes to future pair presentations.

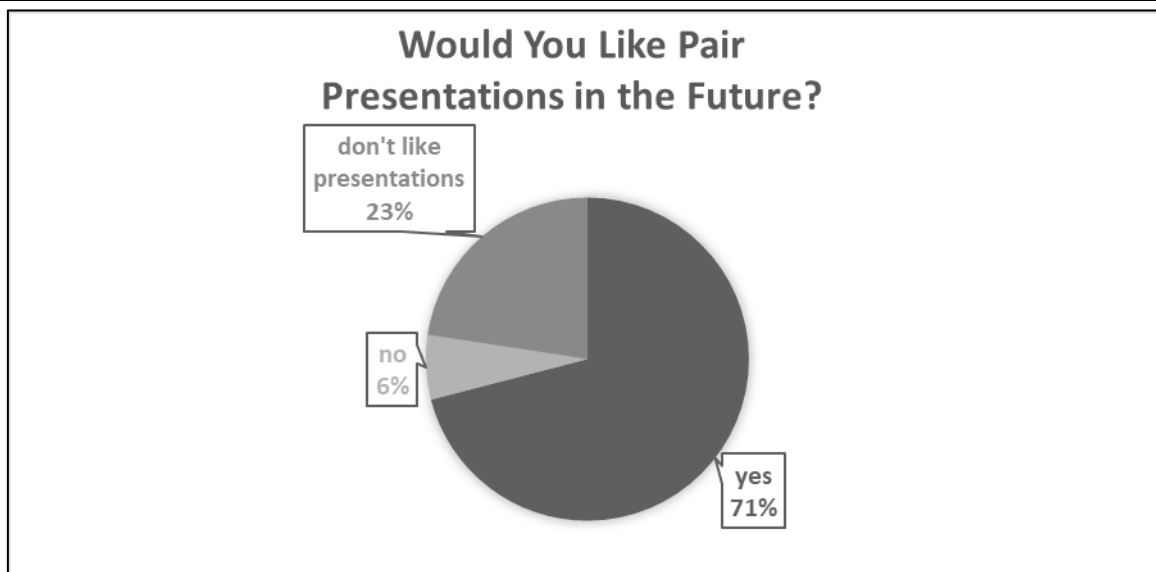


Figure 7: Participants' attitudes to pair presentation in EFL classes

As shown, the vast majority of students (71%) answered *yes*, a tiny minority (6%) said *no*, while slightly less than a quarter of them (23%) could not answer with a clear *yes* or *no*, as they either did not want to have any kind of presentation in their language classes – whether individual or pair – or did not mind whether the presentation was to be made with a partner or on their own. The reasons for not wanting any kind of presentation were dislike of/uneasy feelings about public speaking and its undesirable anxiety symptoms (physical, emotional, cognitive). Sample comments:

"To be honest, I would not want any kind of presentation because I'm really afraid of public speaking. I don't like to speak in front of a large audience, it makes me very anxious and I know it influences how I speak: I might not remember what I want to say or have difficulty getting my tongue around, etc." (# 31)

"I'd rather not have any presentation task. I have a tendency to get stage fright and feel very uncomfortable when I have to stand in front of the others. I'm thinking about what they could be thinking of me, I always feel I will fluff it and they will think what a loser I am. My mouth gets completely dry, I find it hard to put my thoughts together as I'm so anxious, my heart is racing, I have stomach cramps, breathing is also difficult and I'm trembling." (# 5)

In response to whether they would prefer presenting on their own (Figure 8), more than half of the participants answered with a firm *no* and less than a third with a *yes*, while the remaining minority had no particular preference for either individual or pair presentation.

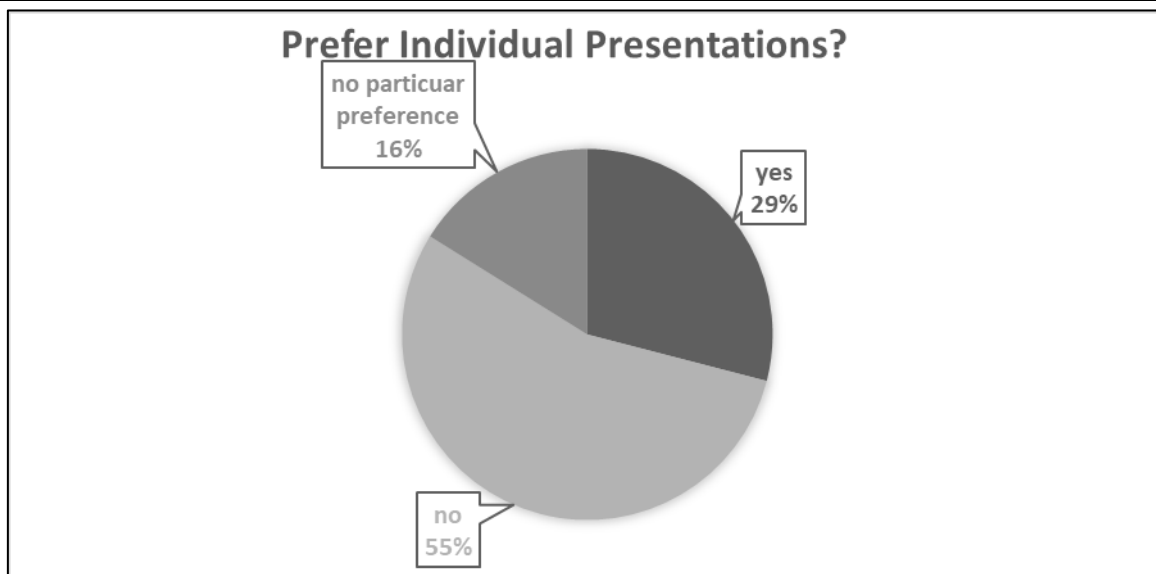


Figure 8: Participants' attitudes to individual presentations in EFL classes

These results show that more students approved of the idea of pair presentation than not (71%) and a relatively small percentage of participants (29%) expressed a preference for individual presentation. In what follows I will look at what participants had to say in favour of making a presentation with vs. without a partner. Table 3 presents what English Studies students considered as benefits of presenting in pairs rather than on their own. As shown, some of these are related to the preparation phase, some to the actual presentation, while others to the quality of the joint presentation.

Table 3: The perceived advantages of pair presentation

Preparation	During Presentation	Quality of Talk
teaches team work functions as team building	reassuring to have say by your side (easier than on my own)	better topics (more interesting/unusual/ surprising)
improves important skills (problem solving, communication, negotiation)	sharing responsibility of making a good talk/shared burden	more dynamic
chance to get to know each other and yourself better	less pressure (which would negatively affect performance)	more variety
motivating (seeing partner working, collecting materials together)	makes me feel more comfortable (in pairs you feel more relaxed)	more interesting to listen to/ attention of listeners is less likely to wander off
co-presenter as helper/ consultant/ somebody to count on	would be less self- confident on my own	
easier, faster, less work	together: less anxiety	
more enjoyable		
more efficient (brainstorming, discussing ideas, more creativity)		

As for the pre-presentation phase, respondents expressed the view that preparing for a presentation with a partner rather than on their own can help them practice team-work, which they believed had important practical value outside the classroom walls. They contended that working together improves communication and negotiation skills, as well as problem solving ability. It is also a unique opportunity to get to know one’s partner as well as oneself more deeply, including personal interests, knowledge, task approach, learning/working style, strengths and weaknesses, thereby a valuable learning experience. The presence of the partner as a ‘consultant’ or ‘helper’ throughout the preparation stage was also regarded as an important benefit. “*Two heads are better than one*” as one respondent aptly put it (# 4). Working for a common goal with someone else was described as ‘motivating’, and the whole process of putting the presentation together as ‘easier’, ‘faster’, ‘more enjoyable’, as well as ‘more efficient’, thanks to the possibility of sharing jobs and responsibilities, including coming up with a good topic, brainstorming ideas, discussing different views and opinions.

As for the actual presentation itself, as Table 3 shows, the most important reason why such a high percentage (71%) of respondents said *yes* to similar pair presentation tasks in the future was a psychological one, and it had to do with the perceived positive effects of the partner on their emotional well-being during the talk. Presenting with a partner rather than on their own was associated with ‘a sense of security’, ‘less pressure on themselves’, ‘lower anxiety’, ‘feeling more comfortable with the situation’, ‘being more relaxed’, and ‘having more self-confidence’.

Finally, having two presenters rather than one was thought to be beneficial for the talk and the audience as well (see Table 3). Presentations delivered by two speakers were seen as potentially more engaging and stimulating, more dynamic and varied, thereby easier to listen to, and thus more capable of keeping participation and attention levels high.

A completely different picture has emerged from the reflections of those participants (29% of the sample) who expressed a preference for individual presentation. As shown in Table 4, the vast majority of the perceived advantages refer to the preparation stage, those concerning the presentation itself are fewer, and no benefits are mentioned at all with regard to the quality of the talk as in the case of pair presentation (cf. Table 3).

Table 4: The perceived advantages of individual presentation

Preparation	During Presentation
more flexible, more comfortable, easier (you are free to decide when to work on what, you can work in your own time/ at your own pace)	can show my strengths/ individual style
less time-consuming (no need to adjust to sy else’s timetable, no difficulty finding the right time to discuss work)	room for improvisation/ spontaneity (no restrictions by pre-planning)
working in sync is not easy/does not make job easier (many difficulties, holds me back, you’re dependent on sy else)	you own the stage (I can speak more, no need to give space to the other)

full control/no need to negotiate (you make all the decisions yourself, everything is in one hand, no need to seek anybody's agreement)	
no need to put up with lower standards (i.e., partner's less than ideal contribution/performance)	

A comparison of the perceived advantages of pair vs. individual presentation reveals that in contrast with students enumerating various advantages of creating and delivering a presentation with a partner (see Table 3), participants expressing a preference for individual presentation had a completely different view of working together (see Table 4). Rather than potential benefits and gains, they tended to see problems and difficulties arising from having to work with someone else. Reading their reflections one almost has the impression that they saw their partner more as a burden or hindrance than help. Students voting for individual presentations, as Table 4 shows, expressed a clear preference for the freedom, flexibility and full control that individual work entails. They were of the opinion that things like (1) having to adjust to someone else's timetable and potentially different work ethic/working style, (2) the difficulty of finding the time to really sit down and work together and (3) the need to discuss everything until a consensus is reached, only make the preparation process more time-consuming, complicated, difficult and less efficient. Additionally, rather than less anxiety-provoking, these students perceived working with a partner actually more stressful because of worries over the partner's reliability, timing or the quality of their contribution. To quote a participant:

"I like to get things done well before the deadline and I found it embarrassing that I wanted to start working on the presentation much earlier than my partner. I bombarded her with my ideas when she hadn't even started to think about what topic we should choose, and it was really embarrassing that I had to nag her every other day with messages asking when we could discuss the presentation. It was a bad feeling, I felt she was holding me back rather than making my job easier. I found this helpless waiting very frustrating. On my own, I would have done the whole thing much quicker and better." (# 31)

As for the actual presentation, a comparison of Tables 3 and 4 again reveals a striking difference between the views of students expressing a preference for pair vs. individual presentation. While for the former, as we have seen, having a partner was clearly positive, in the reflections of the latter, as in the case of the preparation stage, the partner figured more as a hindrance than help. In contrast, individual presentation was seen as a format giving more freedom to the speaker, providing room for spontaneity and improvisation as a result of having full control over the talk. A sample comment:

"I think I'm good at presentations, this is one of my strengths. I enjoy talking about topics I'm interested in and I enjoy speaking in a powerful way. For this you need to be spontaneous and good at improvisation. I don't mean I'm not prepared, but I prepare in

my mind and only rely on a broad outline. In a pair presentation I can't capitalize on this, as everything needs to be carefully planned and timed, which makes me feel restricted. Also, if not sufficiently prepared, your partner can spoil the presentation, no matter how good you are." (# 19)

5. Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to examine whether removing the most anxiety-provoking element from the traditional classroom presentation (i.e., one student being spotlighted in front of the whole class) can make this speaking activity less stressful and more enjoyable for learners. The results of the study are really thought-provoking. While the quantitative results on self-perceived anxiety and task pleasantness do not support the hypothesis that oral presentation might be a more positive, less anxiety-ridden experience for learners if done with a partner, qualitative analysis of the post-task reflections suggest that the hypothesis cannot be entirely discounted.

As for anxiety, contrary to what was expected, pair presenters' self-rated anxiety levels in this study did not differ significantly from those of individual presenters in the earlier research (Tóth, 2019). This finding suggests that presenting with a partner did not automatically result in lower anxiety for learners. On the contrary, more than half of the students (54.6%) participating in pair presentation rated their anxiety as high (i.e., 8, 9 or 10) on the 10-point scale, and the percentage of those with an anxiety-rating above the sample mean (i.e., ≥ 7) was a substantial 63.7%. These percentages show that making an oral presentation, even if with a partner, is a classroom activity that tends to provoke high anxiety in learners. What is more, given participants' fairly high level of English (B2+), this finding shows that anxiety about speaking in public is an issue even for relatively proficient L2 speakers like the English Studies participants of this study. This supports previous findings on anxiety at more advanced levels of proficiency (cf. Ewald, 2007; Horwitz, 1996; Tóth, 2011, 2017).

As for perceived task pleasantness, as in the case of anxiety, the comparison of pair vs. individual presenters' ratings in the present and earlier investigation showed no significant differences between students' perceptions under the two conditions. Although it was expected that presenting with a partner would be perceived by students as a more positive experience, the statistical analysis did not support this hypothesis. In fact, English Studies students' mean ratings of the task pleasantness scale were almost identical under the two conditions ($M_{\text{pair}} = 6.87$; $M_{\text{indiv}} = 6.92$). What is good news, however, is that the majority of participants in both samples marked the positive end of the scale (i.e., ≥ 7), which means they overall perceived the experience to be pleasant/positive rather than unpleasant/negative. This finding shows that despite the fact that making an oral presentation triggered considerable anxiety in learners, it did not feel to be a negative experience altogether. Actually, students reported very similar levels of anxiety and task-pleasantness (cf. pair: $M_{\text{anx}} = 6.81$ vs. $M_{t-p} = 6.87$; individual: $M_{\text{anx}} = 6.51$ vs. $M_{t-p} = 6.92$), which shows that anxiety and positive feelings can go hand in hand, what

is more, can be experienced with similar intensity during the same interaction. This finding lends further empirical support to the idea that anxiety and positive emotions are not to be conceptualised as the opposite ends of an imaginary seesaw (i.e., with anxiety increasing positive emotions decreasing and vice versa) but rather as related but separate emotional dimensions (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele, 2021).

The result that neither anxiety was found to be significantly lower nor task-pleasantness significantly higher in the sample of pair presenters, as hypothesised, calls for an explanation, and even more so in light of the post-task reflections, which seem to suggest a more important role for the partner from the point of view of anxiety and other emotions. The main thrust of the reflections, as we have seen, was that “*two heads are better than one*” (# 4) when it comes to classroom presentations (cf. 4.3.1). This is evidenced by a high percentage of the responses (71 %) relating in so many words how having a partner during the talk contributed to students feeling less anxious and more comfortable with speaking in front of the class. Furthermore, the same seems to be suggested, indirectly though, by the finding that only 29 % of the participants expressed a preference for individual presentation, in contrast with 71 % of them expressing a wish to have similar pair presentation tasks in the future.

While these findings seem to lend support to the hypothesis that working together and presenting with a partner can reduce anxiety and make the whole experience more positive, the reflections have also revealed that this was not universally the case with everyone. There were participants who experienced severe anxiety reactions during the presentation – with disturbing physical, emotional and cognitive manifestations – in spite of their partner’s reassuring presence. Although these learners might have perceived preparing together as a positive experience (cf. 4.3.2), these positive feelings and perceptions did not translate into lower anxiety and higher task-pleasantness ratings. For these learners, having a fellow student by their side to share the stage with was not enough to reduce their anxiety and feel more comfortable about giving a talk in front of the class. Contrarily, they reported feeling as anxious as if they had been presenting on their own (cf. 4.3.2).

Another group of respondents for whom pair presentation did not seem to do the trick was students who felt that working together with someone else did not reduce but, to the contrary, increased their anxiety. Furthermore, rather than making the experience more positive, it made it less so, as in addition to nervousness it made them experience a range of other negative emotions, such as frustration, helplessness, dissatisfaction, etc., as a result of the partner’s different work ethic/working style and the quality of their performance during the actual presentation (cf. 4.3.2). All these negative feelings must again have resulted in higher anxiety and lower task-pleasantness ratings.

These qualitative results help us see behind anxiety and task-pleasantness means and obtain a more meaningful and informative picture about the hypothesised partner effect. As shown, doing a presentation with a partner elicited different emotional responses from individual learners rather than affecting them in the same way. While it helped many participants feel more comfortable with the situation, it did not help others,

who still experienced high levels of anxiety. Furthermore, still another group of students found working with a partner not less but more stressful as well as arousing a range of negative emotions, thereby a less positive experience.

Additionally, the reflection data has also brought to light valuable information about how participants prepared for the pair presentation (reflection Qs 4-6), which can also help us gain a better understanding of the results discussed above. One of the most revealing findings was that out of the 16 pairs none rehearsed their talk together before the actual presentation (Q6). As reasons for this, respondents tended to refer to lack of time and/or difficulty finding the right time for both parties due to different timetables. However, there also appeared another reason in participants' responses, which seems to be pivotal to interpreting the results. The main reason why they did not rehearse their talk together was that *"the presentation was composed of separate parts (two or more), and everybody was responsible for their own part(s)"*, which they practiced or did not practice individually depending on whether they deemed it necessary or not. This finding shows that rather than conceiving the presentation as a whole and treating it as their common baby they are equally responsible for, participants tended to concentrate on their *"own part(s)"/contribution*. Skipping the step of rehearsing the presentation, they deprived themselves of the opportunity to practice their speech and get feedback on language and delivery before speaking in front of the entire class. This could have helped them identify potential problems, make necessary changes or corrections, as well as rehearse problematic aspects (e.g., words with a difficult pronunciation, etc.) – which might have granted them more self-confidence. While it is true that rehearsing a talk in pairs is *"not the same as the real thing, when the audience is there and we begin to feel the anxiety rising in our body"* (# 31), as one participant aptly put it, it might have helped participants get used to the situation of speaking in front of someone else, even if just one student, which would have been especially beneficial for students with a history of stage fright. Furthermore, it could have saved students from experiencing undue anxiety and other negative emotions concerning the partner's performance, as rehearsing together could have pre-empted many potential problems they talked about in their reflections (cf. 4.3). Although out of the 33 students 12 reported that they had practiced their *"own part(s)"* on their own, this way they could not make use of their partner's potential comments or suggestions for improvement.

Responses to the questions asking participants to describe in detail how they prepared for the presentation (Qs 4 and 5) have revealed that it was not just rehearsing together that students missed, they also missed other opportunities to really work *together* at various stages of the preparation process. Table 5 presents a summary of the most important findings on how participants shared the different tasks involved and how they actually completed the task of producing a joint presentation.

Table 5: Division of labour between partners and types of peer collaboration

Finding Topic	Collecting Materials	ppt	Peer Collaboration
1 student decides (n*=1)	1 student collects (n=3)	1 student creates whole ppt (n=4)	dividing job/ working individually (n=3)
1 student proposes – partner accepts (n=5)	both collect, then share (n=6)	everybody creates their own part (n=6)	combination of working together and individually (n=9)
together (n=10)	together (n=4)	together (n=5)	working together (n=3)

* n does not refer to individual students but pairs. The numbers in the columns may not add up to 16 (15 pairs + 1 group of 3), as not all topics came up in every reflection.

As shown, not all pairs got together (in person or online) to brainstorm ideas for possible topics, which could have helped them find an aspect of the given topics (i.e., *Health & Lifestyles* or *Arts & Entertainment*) both themselves and their classmates would find interesting/stimulating/thought-provoking/topical, etc. Rather than doing this very important first step together, increasing their chances of success, in five cases one student took the initiative and proposed a topic, which the partner accepted without further ado. What is more, in one case one member of the team decided not only on the topic all by herself but even collected all the materials without consulting the partner. Working together at the stage of collecting materials was realised to an even lesser extent. Only four pairs sat down together to identify, discuss and select useful materials, six pairs did this job individually, whereas in three cases only one of the team members worked on this sub-task, which obviously excluded any chance of negotiation and joint responsibility for content. Dividing the job of creating a ppt for the talk shows a very similar pattern. Merely five pairs reported that they had created the ppt together (in person or using Google Slides). In contrast, in six cases each member of the team made the slides only for their own part(s), and in four cases creating the whole ppt was the sole responsibility of one of the students. These findings show that most pairs did not work together at each stage, on each task, exchanging ideas and opinions all the way through and making decisions together.

Three basic patterns of peer collaboration have been identified, exhibiting different degrees of cooperation (see last column in Table 5). True cooperation, i.e., working on each sub-task together and taking a joint responsibility for the final product, happened only in the case of three pairs, who really produced the presentation together either via various online platforms (google drive, shared Word document, google slides, Facebook, chat) or in person. At the opposite end of the scale were another three pairs who simply divided the various jobs mechanically (e.g., one of them collected materials, the other made the ppt; the talk was divided into two parts, with one student starting, the other finishing it, etc.), i.e., basically, they worked on the presentation on their own rather than together. In between these two (i.e., true cooperation and in essence individual work) can be placed those nine pairs who combined working together at certain stages of the

preparation process with working on their own at others. Within this category, two basic patterns of collaboration have been observed: one with alternating *together* (T) and *individual* (I) phases and the other with an extensive planning stage carried out together, followed by a pure individual stage already unsupervised by the partner, as shown below:

(1) T: finding topic (in person or online) + I: collecting materials and sharing them online + T: finalising content and discussing who talks about which sub-topic (online or in person) + I: creating slides for their own parts only.

(2) T (in person): finding topic, collecting materials, creating a broad outline and ppt + I: collecting further materials for own part(s), refining and fine-tuning own content and corresponding slides.

These findings have revealed that individual pairs prepared for the pair presentation adopting different strategies in working together, ranging, as shown, from real cooperation and thinking together throughout the process to working on allotted tasks virtually alone as if preparing for an individual presentation. Obviously, the emotional experiences of a student talking about a topic chosen by someone else cannot be compared to those of another who talks about a personally relevant or important issue, selected as a result of negotiation with the partner, with a view also to whether the audience would like it or not. Similarly, talking about materials/sources carefully selected and thoroughly discussed with the partner must feel completely different from talking about something put together by someone else, with you being only a mouthpiece. Also, seeing and hearing the partner's contribution for the first time during the actual presentation must produce feelings and emotions entirely different from those of a student knowing the partner's contribution as their own. In short, how participants perceived presenting in pairs, specifically, how anxious or comfortable they felt and whether they experienced positive or negative emotions during the talk must have been strongly affected by how they prepared for the joint performance and consequently to what extent they could reap the benefits of having a partner in making their presentation.

6. Conclusion

Are then two heads better than one when it comes to oral presentation in the language classroom? Can pair presentation be a panacea for anxiety about speaking in front of an entire class? Can having a partner make classroom presentation a more positive experience for learners? In light of the results discussed above, the answer to these questions is a potential *yes*. Potential, as the hypothesised positive effects of pair presentation can only exert their influence if partners really work *together* to create their presentation, helping, supporting each other all the way through, as this is what can potentially make them more confident and less worried about both content and delivery. Most pairs in this study, as evidenced by their reflections, did not make the most of this opportunity, which might explain their higher than expected anxiety and less positive overall feelings during their talk.

Therefore, the most important pedagogical implication of this investigation is that teachers should make sure learners are aware of the value of peer collaboration and how this can help them with public speaking. It is imperative that they provide guidelines for learners on how to work together so that the advantages of having a partner could be maximised. Although in this study English Studies participants were instructed to prepare the presentation together, this did not prove sufficient. More explicit and detailed guidelines are necessary and the importance of rehearsing the talk together must be particularly emphasised. In the absence of such guidance, as shown, participants failed to try out their contribution with their partner before the actual presentation in front of the entire class. Rehearsing their talk might have reduced their anxiety and made them experience more positive feelings, translating into lower anxiety and higher task-pleasantness ratings.

Another important recommendation for teachers is that although pair presentation has numerous benefits, many of which were also acknowledged by most participants in this study, it should not be forced on students. As evidenced by the reflection findings, while the majority of participants approved of the idea of presenting with a partner, there were also students who expressed a clear preference for working individually. Therefore, to suit all learners' emotional needs, teachers are advised to be flexible and offer students a choice between doing their presentation with a partner or on their own. This way students who do not feel confident and comfortable enough to speak in front of the class all by themselves could opt for sharing the stage with someone else, whereas those who do not need this emotional support or simply prefer preparing and presenting on their own could go for the traditional individual presentation.

The study has achieved its aim of checking "*the emotional temperature*" in the university EFL classroom in a specific language class situation: learners giving oral presentations in pairs. The combination of quantitative measurement of self-rated anxiety and task-pleasantness with a qualitative assessment of participants' emotional experiences with the help of post-task reflections has proved beneficial. The rich reflection data have yielded valuable information not only about participants' feelings and attitudes to pair presentation but also about how they actually prepared for this task, which has proved instrumental in interpreting the numerical results. Further research is necessary to see whether learners experience less anxiety and more positive emotions when presenting in pairs if properly instructed to cooperate. Future studies could also explore students' emotional experiences of pair presentation in other instructional settings.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

About the author

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