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Investigating Japanese EFL learners' communication apprehension and oral presentation strategies

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ABSTRACT

This study examines communication apprehension (CA) and oral presentation strategies among Japanese English as a foreign language (EFL) learner to understand their impact on verbal communication challenges. Despite educational reforms prioritizing communicative competence, Japanese learners face persistent difficulties, particularly in formal contexts like public speaking. A descriptive quantitative design was employed, and a purposive sampling method was used to select a sample of 140 EFL learners from a private Japanese university. Data was collected using the oral presentation strategies inventory (OPSI) and the personal report of communication apprehension (PRCA). Quantitative analysis via SPSS 29 assessed learners' apprehension levels and strategy use patterns. Findings revealed moderate CA levels, with interpersonal communication inducing the most anxiety and public speaking causing the least. Learners relied heavily on message reduction and alteration (MRA) strategies, simplifying expressions to manage anxiety, while non-verbal (NV) strategies were minimally utilized. Positive correlations between strategy use and CA highlight the potential of targeted strategies to mitigate apprehension. Practical implications include the need to integrate Japanese cultural values into pedagogy to manage CA through collaborative learning, peer assistance, and structured oral activities, while also balancing accuracy with fluency and utilizing technological tools to support language development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The history of English language education in Japan is divided into four major periods according to the purposes of English language education set by the government in the different periods: i) 1808 to 1945, when English was first introduced and taught in schools mainly for elite classes; ii) 1945 to 1970, when English became part of the compulsory education for the first time; iii) 1970 to 1990, when English began to be regarded as the most effective means to communicate with foreign people in the rapidly shrinking world; and iv) 1990 to the present, when several innovative policies have been introduced into classroom measurement systems [1]–[5].

During the 1808-1945 period, the foundations of the traditional method of 'grammar translation and reading', which was the former trend in English language teaching (ELT) in Japan, were laid. Intervention in English language education by the Japanese government dates to the Phaeton Incident of 1808.

The Tokugawa Shogunate, which was under the policy of national seclusion, was threatened by the military power of the British and ordered Dutch interpreters in Nagasaki to learn English. 40 years later, these interpreters received English education through an American smuggler, Ranald MacDonald. During his stay, he taught English through a grammar- and translation-based approach. The purpose of the study of a foreign language in this period was primarily to understand and learn about foreign culture and civilization, along with science and technology. In order to satisfy this objective, what was most important was to read and comprehend foreign texts, and as such, the grammar-translation method served well for the progress of Japanese society. Because of the above background in early education, in addition to the inherent shyness of the Japanese, English language education in Japan has long tended to focus on the passive aspects, especially reading, rather than the active skills of speaking a foreign language.

English studies in Japan made remarkable progress in the years following the opening of the ports at Shimoda, Hakodate, and Yokohama. Dutch scholars including Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901: enlightenment thinker and educator; founder of Keio University) shifted their focus to English study, and many language teachers and official interpreters began publishing English dictionaries, grammar books, and textbooks. The first decade of the Meiji era witnessed the sudden emergence of English studies as a discipline primarily for obtaining Western knowledge and technology. However, when the Meiji government was confronted with serious financial difficulties caused by the Seinan War (1877), they had to drastically reduce the number of those high-salaried foreign teachers in their employment. In 1885, the government at last put forth the policy for Japanizing the medium of instruction at all levels of education. Thus, English was dethroned from its former dominant position in learning and education in Japan. In the latter half of the Meiji period (1890–1912), English studies were deprived of its practical function and gradually divided into two fields: the subject of highly specialized academic research, such as linguistics and literary studies, and one subject in school education.

During the 1945-1970 period, English studies developed in two separate fields: research English and educational English, respectively. After the period of militarism leading up to the Pacific War (1941–1945), when English was designated as the language of the enemy, English studies in Japan resumed their practices of research and education centered around universities. English studies were structurally divided into the theory-based English-related academia and the practice-based ELT arena, specialized high-class English studies and low-class English education, which lead a dissociation of identity, especially among scholars of English literature and linguistics, most of whom were at the same time teachers of English and teacher-trainers by profession at universities. Around the same time, budding theories of Western applied linguistics; one of which was audio-lingualism, were brought into Japan to help ELT emerge as a scientific discipline to be pursued academically. Gradually, however, especially after World War II, as the need for external communication increased, different methods and approaches were introduced to develop oral skills, not only reading and writing, but also listening and speaking. Specialized speaking classes started, mainly in private language schools. However, much of what was taught in schools did not change dramatically, and pupils mostly read texts and translated them through grammatical analysis. Also, at university, the average English class consisted mostly of translations of literary works, as it was usually literature professors, not language teachers, who taught English.

In the 1970s, a debate arose between the need for practical ELT and the need for foreign language teaching as an intellectual endeavor. As communicative foreign language skills became recognized as one of the key competencies for survival in a globalized world, the societal demand for these skills also increased. When communicative language teaching came to be regarded as the most efficient method of teaching English, ELT professionals sought to meet these social and educational demands. At the same time, they excluded the old literature-oriented disciplines and widened the professional gap between them and educators who followed traditional English studies.

As social demands for English for communicative purposes increased, a radical reform of education began in the early 1990s. During this period the Ministry of Education announced an epoch-making course of study for foreign language teaching. The nationwide structural reform of higher education started, and faculties and departments of such “impractical” disciplines as liberal arts and literary studies (including English studies) began to close under the government’s utilitarian and rational policies. Urged on by the social demand for practice- and communication-oriented language education, the Ministry of Education launched a large-scale reform of English education policies. The 1993 version of the course of study for junior high schools stated that the objective of foreign language teaching is “to cultivate attitudes to actively communicate,” and in 1994 the new course of study for senior high school stated that the goal of foreign language teaching is “to cultivate practical communicative competence.” In 1998 and 1999, the course guidelines for junior high schools and high schools were revised (and enforced, respectively, in 2002 and 2003) so that greater emphasis should be placed on oral communication. The Ministry of Education announced that the 2002 courses of study would introduce international understanding education into the primary school curriculum. English conversation

classes have already started in many primary schools. In terms of language teaching in higher education, universities have been forced to shift from traditional literary, grammar-oriented methods of translation to communicative language teaching. However, the significance of English language learning itself is beginning to be questioned due to the remarkable development of artificial intelligence (AI) technology-based translation tools and other tools. Currently, English language education in Japan is trying to return to the fundamental question of why Japanese people learn English.

The history of English language education in Japan reflects a series of evolving reforms aimed at aligning educational practices with global communicative demands. As Japan's English education system shifted towards communicative competence in response to societal demands, a stronger focus was placed on practical language skills like oral communication. These reforms sought to equip students with the ability to use English in real-world situations, moving away from traditional, grammar-based methods toward interactive, communication-centered approaches. However, despite these advancements, many Japanese learners of English still struggle with key aspects of verbal communication, particularly public speaking and oral presentations [6], which are vital for academic and professional success in a globalized world [7].

Recent studies highlight the significant impact of anxiety on learners' oral performance in English as a foreign language (EFL) context. Anxiety, often manifested as communication apprehension (CA), is associated with reduced willingness to communicate and impaired performance in speaking tasks [8], [9]. For Japanese learners, cultural factors such as the fear of making mistakes, reluctance to stand out, and teacher-centered instructional methods exacerbate these challenges [10]. Past researches has also highlighted that CA is particularly acute in presentation settings, where the pressure of performance and fear of negative evaluation are heightened [6], [11].

The role of anxiety control in learning English has been a significant focus of research, with numerous studies investigating CA and its relationship with language learning. Studies indicate that Japanese EFL learners experience heightened speech anxiety in performance settings, often leading to reduced willingness to communicate language [8]–[10]. Factors such as overthinking, lack of preparation, past negative experiences, poor pronunciation, low self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes have been identified as key contributors to speaking anxiety [11], [12]. Cultural norms further influence this anxiety, as traditional classroom settings in Japan emphasize passive learning and discourage conspicuousness, making students more apprehensive about oral presentations [9]. Classroom dynamics, including varying proficiency levels and teacher-centered instruction, also play a role in increasing anxiety [6], [9].

To mitigate these challenges, various strategies have been proposed. For instance, preparation and rehearsal have been identified as effective in reducing anxiety and enhancing confidence [9]. Non-verbal (NV) strategies, such as maintaining eye contact and using gestures, have also been shown to positively influence audience engagement and speaker confidence. In addition, strategies like preparation, relaxation, and positive thinking have been found to help alleviate anxiety [8]. However, the extent to which these strategies correlate with CA levels among Japanese EFL learners remains underexplored, creating a gap that this study aims to address. Considering the research gap and issues highlighted, the present study seeks to identify the coping strategies employed by Japanese EFL learners and examine how these strategies are connected to CA. To this end, the study aims to address the following research questions:

- What is the level of CA among Japanese EFL learners?
- What oral presentation strategies are used by Japanese EFL learners during oral presentations?
- What is the correlation between oral presentation strategies and CA among Japanese EFL learners?

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive approach to examining the relationship between CA and oral presentation strategies. Unlike prior research, which often focuses on either anxiety or strategy use in isolation, this study integrates both dimensions to provide a holistic understanding of the factors influencing oral communication in EFL settings. The findings are expected to inform pedagogical practices, offering practical recommendations for reducing anxiety and fostering effective communication skills.

2. METHOD

The study employs descriptive quantitative research design. Surveys were used to assess oral presentation apprehension and speaking strategies. Coping strategies were evaluated through oral presentation strategies inventory (OPSI) that was adapted from oral communication strategies inventory (OCSI) developed by Nakatani [13], while personal report of communication apprehension (PRCA)-24 developed by McCroskey [14] was adopted to determine the levels of CA. The quantitative analysis administered using SPSS 29 determined the respondents' level of apprehension and the strategies they employed when delivering oral presentations and ascertained the relationships between apprehension and strategies.

Purposive sampling was employed to obtain the participants for this study. The participants were 140 Japanese EFL learners from a private university in Japan. Among them, 89 are male and 51 are female.

According to Creswell and Creswell [15], the sample size of 140 participants aligns with recommendations for quantitative studies as a minimum of 100 participants is required to ensure meaningful statistical analysis. All participants majored in forest science from the Faculty of Regional Environmental Science, with the majority being first-semester students. They were enrolled in general English education at the time the study was conducted. The sample was selected based on their enrolment in general English classes, where they are required to deliver at least one oral presentation in English during the semester. This requirement made them suitable participants for investigating the relationship between CA and oral presentation strategies.

As mentioned earlier, the study made use of two survey instruments in data collection: OPSI and the PRCA-24 [14]. Respondents' coping strategies during oral presentations were gathered using the OPSI. The survey focuses specifically on five strategies relevant to oral presentations, namely social affective (SA) strategies, fluency-oriented (FO) strategies, accuracy-oriented (AO) strategies, message reduction and alteration (MRA) strategies, and NV strategies. The OPSI employs a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). It is divided into two sections: the first section collects the respondents' demographic information, and the second gathers data on the strategies they employ during oral presentations. The adapted questionnaire comprises 30 items distributed across the five strategies. A reliability analysis of the OPSI, after removing several items from Nakatani [13] original version, yielded a Cronbach's alpha score of .885, indicating a high level of reliability.

Respondents' CA data were obtained using the PRCA-24 [14]. The PRCA-24 was designed to help individuals evaluate their level of CA. It measures overall anxiety and anxiety in four distinct communication contexts: interpersonal or dyadic, small group or large group meetings, and public speaking. It recorded an excellent predictive validity with a reliability coefficient (α) greater than .90 [14]. The PRCA-24 employs a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Table 1 summarizes the scoring formula for the PRCA-24.

The data analysis was conducted according to the research objectives set by the study. The data collected from OPSI and PRCA-24 were analyzed descriptively with the total scores and mean for the results were calculated and matched with the description given in the scores provided. The adapted OPSI followed scoring suggested by Nakatani [13] while PRCA-24 scoring followed that by McCroskey [14]. To find the correlations between oral presentation strategies and CA, Spearman rho method was used. This method was selected because Spearman's rho evaluates monotonic relationships, making it useful for ordinal data or non-normally distributed continuous data [16]. The coefficient ranges from -1 to +1, where +1 indicates a perfect positive correlation, -1 indicates a perfect negative correlation, and 0 indicates no correlation [16]. The interpretation of the coefficient varies slightly among studies, but common thresholds categorize the strength of correlation as: weak (.1 to .3), moderate (.4 to .6), and strong (.7 to .9) [17].

Table 1. Scoring formula of PRCA-24

Sub-scores	Scoring formula
Small groups	18+ scores for items 2, 4, and 6; −scores for items 1, 3, and 5
Large groups	18+ scores for items 8, 9, and 12; −scores for items 7, 10, and 11
Dyadic interaction	18+ scores for items 14, 16, and 17; −scores for items 13, 15, and 18
Public speaking	18+ scores for items 19, 21, and 23; −scores for items 20, 22, and 24

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study are presented in response to the research questions, focusing on the CA levels among Japanese EFL learners, oral presentation strategies they employ, and correlations between these strategies and CA.

3.1. The level of communication apprehension among Japanese EFL learners

The PRCA-24 provides insights into the level of CA level experienced by the learners in four different communication contexts: group discussion, meeting, interpersonal communication, and public speaking. For the analysis, scores were tabulated according to the prescribed calculations, as seen in Table 1. The scores can range from 24 to 120. Table 2 describes the scoring for the levels of anxiety where: i) scores below 51 represent people who have very low CA; ii) scores between 51 to 80 represent people with average CA; and iii) scores above 80 represent people who have high levels of trait CA [16].

Table 2. Scoring description of PRCA-24

Description	High	Low
Total score	>80	<51
Group discussion	>20	<11
Meeting	>20	<13
Interpersonal communication	>18	<11
Public speaking	>24	<24

The analysis suggests most respondents experienced a moderate level of CA across all four contexts. The mean scores consistently fall in the range of 2.9-3.1 with a total mean of 2.99, as shown in Table 3. This indicates a generally moderate CA level among the respondents.

The total PRCA-24 scores show that about 87% of the respondents fall within the moderate CA range. The highest frequency can be seen in the 64-74 range. Figure 1 illustrates the total scores for PRCA-24. The results align with previous study that reported a moderate level of CA among EFL students are prevalent due to cultural communication norms, limited proficiency, and psychological factors [17].

Approximately 10% exhibited high CA while 3% of the learners had low levels of CA. This provides evidence of varied apprehension levels among a group of learners as suggested by McCroskey's scoring guidelines [14], [18]. The following section examines the CA level in each of the communication contexts.

Table 3. Level of CA

Communication context	N	Mean	SD
Group discussion	140	3.11	.5929
Meeting	140	2.92	.5627
Interpersonal communication	140	3.00	.4816
Public speaking	140	2.92	.6031
Total mean scores	140	2.99	.4697

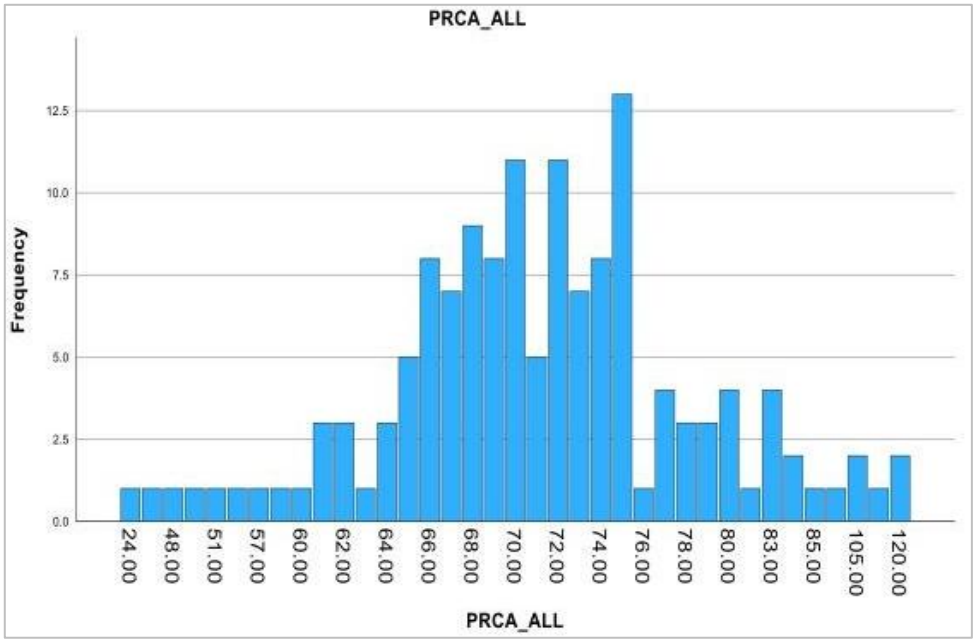

Figure 1. Total scores of PRCA-24

3.1.1. Group discussion

The analysis shows that 72% of the respondents experienced moderate CA during group discussions, with scores ranging from 13 to 20 and a mean of 3.11. Scores between 14–17 suggest that while learners are hesitant, they do not completely avoid participation. Meanwhile, 25% of the respondents scored above 20 suggesting a high level of CA during group discussions which could potentially be due to their limited language proficiency or cultural communication norms that do not encourage assertive

communication in group contexts [12]. The data also observes a small percentage of learners with low CA (3%). This shows that only a few learners felt entirely comfortable and confident during group discussions. This is consistent with previous study that reported the differences in learners' levels of comfort and confidence with oral communication. Jalleh *et al.* [19] for instance found that a small subset of EFL students demonstrate low CA because of their strong linguistic proficiency, exposure to the discussion dynamics and extrovert personality traits.

3.1.2. Meetings

In meeting contexts, 83% of respondents exhibited moderate CA, with scores concentrated between 13 and 20 (mean 2.92). This aligns with Malik *et al.* [20], who found moderate apprehension among Chinese EFL learners due to psychological, linguistic, and cultural factors. In this study, about 13% of the respondents reported that they had a high level of apprehension during meetings. This aligns with prior studies that found formal and structured communication contexts can increase anxiety due to the formality of the environment and fear of negative evaluation by peers [19]. The remaining 4% of the respondents have a low level of CA, suggesting that only a low proportion of students are comfortable or confident during meetings. This could be attributed to their proficiency level in English and personal traits like confidence and extroversion personality [17].

3.1.3. Interpersonal communication

Moderate CA was also observed in interpersonal communication, with 71% of respondents falling in this category (mean 3.00, range=14-18). Anxiety in this context is likely to stem from limited proficiency and confidence in language use, as noted by Huda *et al.* [8]. Notably, 28% of respondents reported experiencing high CA during dyadic communication. This suggests that EFL learners find it challenging to communicate even in less formal and unstructured communication environments. Previous studies attribute high CA to factors such as cultural influences, including low- and high-context communication styles, and language proficiency [8], [19]. The data also reveal that fewer than 1% of learners feel entirely at ease or comfortable in interpersonal settings. This small proportion highlights the impact of internal factors like self-confidence and language proficiency on communication ease [8], [19].

3.1.4. Public speaking

Moderate levels of CA were also reported in public speaking with 86.5% of respondents fall in this category (mean 2.99, range=15-20). This suggests that most of the respondents feel overly apprehensive during public speaking, like group discussion, meeting, and interpersonal communication. However, for 3.6% of respondents, public speaking is the most anxiety-inducing context. This aligns with previous studies identifying public speaking as the most stressful communication activity due to fear of evaluation and performance pressure [8], [19]. Interestingly, a higher percentage of respondents (10%) reported low CA in public speaking compared to other sections, indicating that they are comfortable with the activity. This suggests that the learners are comfortable with public speaking that could be due to their higher proficiency and confidence in English as reported by previous studies [19].

3.2. Strategies employed during oral presentations

In gauging the strategies employed by Japanese EFL learners during oral presentations, data from OPSI were analyzed. OPSI looks at five strategies employed by the learners in doing their presentations, i.e., SA, FO, AO, MRA, and NV. The analysis shows that the respondents employed all five oral presentation strategies in their oral presentation activities. Table 4 reports the mean scores for each of the strategies employed. As can be seen in Table 4, the most used strategies are those categorized under the MRA category (mean=3.81). This is followed by the SA strategies (mean=3.49), FO strategies (mean=3.43), and AO strategies (mean=3.32). The least popular strategies employed by the learners are those under the NV category (mean=3.21). The following section presents and discusses each of the categories.

Table 4. Oral presentation strategies employed by Japanese EFL learners

Strategy	N	Mean
SA	140	3.49
FO	140	3.43
AO	140	3.32
MRA	140	3.81
NV	140	3.21
Total mean scores	140	3.45

3.2.1. Social affective strategies

SA strategies include managing anxiety, enjoying the presentation, making a good impression, expressing oneself, taking risks, and using fillers. Among these, making a good impression ranks highest (mean=3.80), followed by managing anxiety (mean=3.79), using fillers (mean=3.61), expressing oneself (mean=3.54), and enjoying the presentation (mean=3.25). These findings suggest learners prioritize projecting confidence and creating a positive impression, hence they employ various strategies to ensure presentation success. However, learners are less inclined to take risks, with this strategy scoring the lowest (mean=2.96). This reflects a reluctance to jeopardize their performance, aligning with past studies [10], [21] that fear of mistakes limits risk-taking in communication.

3.2.2. Fluency-oriented strategies

The FO strategies involve six components which focus on: i) rhythm and intonation; ii) pronunciation; iii) presentation flow; iv) context appropriate speech; v) pace of delivery; and vi) clarity of voice. The findings indicate that the participants placed greater priority on strategies that would help them deliver the presentation effectively and ensure the audience's attention. This is shown by the emphasis put on clarity of voice (mean=3.67) and flow of presentation (mean=3.59). Studies show that clear communication not only can boost the speakers' confidence, but also on the audience's engagement [10]. Other strategies, namely rhythm and intonation (mean=3.32), pronunciation (mean=3.33), context-appropriate speech (mean=3.31), and pace of delivery (mean=3.40) are also considered important but receive comparatively less emphasis.

3.2.3. Accuracy-oriented strategies

AO strategies prioritize correct language use, encompassing attention to grammar rules, recalling learned rules, self-correcting, emphasizing sentence structure, and striving for native-like pronunciation. The most employed AO is self-correcting after errors (mean=3.94), indicating learners' strong desire for accuracy and self-awareness. Paying attention to grammar rules and recalling learned rules are equally emphasized (mean=3.32). Interestingly, striving for native-like pronunciation is the least used strategy (mean=3.04), reflecting its lower relevance in the learners' context. These findings align with studies like Luque-Jimenez [22], which highlight advanced learners' focus on accuracy. However, contrasting results have been reported, Nguyen *et al.* [23] found AO to be less utilized by ESL learners in Vietnam.

3.2.4. Message reduction and alteration strategies

The MRA strategies focus on strategies that facilitate effective oral delivery and aid comprehension. The strategies include: i) reducing the message to simpler expressions; ii) using familiar words; iii) substituting difficult words with simpler ones; iv) simplifying complex ideas or concepts; and v) rephrasing sentences to make them clearer. The analysis indicates that the most employed strategy by the respondents under the MRA category is using words that are familiar to them (mean=3.99). This shows that the learners prefer using familiar words as they are readily available in their repertoire. This is also a strategy to minimize mistakes that may occur if unfamiliar words are used. In addition, by using words that they know well, they would be able to convey the message effectively as they are in control of the vocabulary when delivering their presentations. Relatively, most of the learners often opt to substitute difficult words with simpler ones (mean=3.90) and reduce the message to simpler expressions (mean=3.77). This aligns with Luque-Jimenez [22] findings, which also reported using familiar words and simple expressions as the preferred strategies under the MRA category. Other strategies employed to enhance confidence during delivery and to aid audience's comprehension include simplifying complex ideas or concepts (mean=3.75) and rephrasing sentences to make them clearer (mean=3.66). The latter is the least preferred strategy compared to the others in the same category as rephrasing sentences can be quite challenging for EFL learners.

3.2.5. Non-verbal strategies

The NV strategies refer to NV actions employed during presentations, including: i) making eye contact; ii) using gestures and facial expressions to reinforce messages; iii) employing pauses and silence for emphasis; iv) controlling tone of voice; v) adjusting presentation pace to suit the audience; vi) moving around; and vii) standing up straight. The analysis reveals that the most employed strategies are making eye contact (mean=3.55) and using gestures and facial expressions (mean=3.55). This indicates that learners recognize the importance of establishing rapport with the audience and maintaining engagement. These findings align with Nguyen *et al.* [23] study, which identified these strategies as the most preferred among learners during oral presentations. Despite their efforts to connect with the audience, learners show a preference for standing still during presentations (mean=3.51) over moving around (mean=2.54). Other strategies, such as using pauses and silence for emphasis, controlling tone of voice, and adjusting presentation pace, are less frequently employed (mean=3.00, mean=3.16, and mean=3.16, respectively).

In summary, in terms of strategies employed, learners seem to focus on those that can help them manage anxiety and create a positive impression. They also pay attention to keeping their speech clear and easy to understand, which shows that audience comprehension is very important to them. Overall, learners focus on professionalism, clarity, and connecting with the audience while being careful to avoid errors.

3.3. Correlation between oral presentation strategies and communication apprehension

The analysis shows strong and moderate positive correlations between the OPSI factors, namely SA, FO, AO, MRA, and NV. As shown in Table 5, there is a strong positive correlation between SA and FO (ρ=.548, p<.001), meaning as SA increases, FO tends to increase as well. The correlation between SA and AO is moderate (ρ=.461, p<.001). FO and AO also have a strong positive correlation (ρ=.573, p<.001). MRA is linked with the other factors at moderate to strong levels. SA and MRA have a correlation of ρ=.560 (p<.001). NV is significantly connected with all other factors, such as its correlation with AO (ρ=.554, p<.001).

Looking at the CA measures, group mean shows moderate positive correlations with SA (ρ=.376, p<.001), AO (ρ=.403, p<.001), and NV (ρ=.251, p=.003). This shows that higher scores in these factors are associated with higher general CA. The correlations between meeting mean and the OPSI factors are weaker, but the most notable is with AO (ρ=.167, p=.049). Public speaking means moderate positive correlations with SA (ρ=.248, p=.003), FO (ρ=.218, p=.010), and AO (ρ=.280, p<.001). This would suggest that these OPSI factors are linked to public speaking apprehension. Interpersonal mean, which measures interpersonal apprehension, has its strongest link with AO (ρ=.295, p<.001) and shows moderate correlations with MRA (ρ=.204, p=.015) and NV (ρ=.269, p=.001).

Table 5. Correlation between oral presentation strategies and CA

Strategy			SA	FO	AO	MRA	NV	PRCA_ Grp MEAN	PRCA_ Meet_ MEAN	PRC_ PS_ MEAN	PRCA_ Inter_ MEAN
Spearman's rho	SA	Correlation coefficient	1	.548**	.461**	.560**	.532**	.376**	.094	.248**	.187*
		Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.267	.003	.027
		N	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140
	FO	Correlation coefficient	.548**	1	.573**	.474**	.502**	.237**	-.071	.218**	.144
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	.005	.404	.01	.089
		N	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140
	AO	Correlation coefficient	.461**	.573**	1	.435**	.554**	.403**	.167*	.280**	.295**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	.049	<.001	<.001
		N	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140
	MRA	Correlation coefficient	.560**	.474**	.435**	1	.431**	.321**	.024	.132	.204*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001	.776	.12	.015
		N	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140
	NV	Correlation coefficient	.532**	.502**	.554**	.431**	1	.251**	.076	.312**	.269**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001		.003	.372	<.001	.001
		N	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140
	PRCA_ Group_ MEAN	Correlation coefficient	.376**	.237**	.403**	.321**	.251**	1	.367**	.365**	.509**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.005	<.001	<.001	.003		<.001	<.001	<.001
		N	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140
	PRCA_ Meeting _MEAN	Correlation coefficient	.094	-.071	.167*	.024	.076	.367**	1	.356**	.466**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.267	.404	.049	.776	.372	<.001		<.001	<.001
		N	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140
	PRCA_ Public Speaking _MEAN	Correlation coefficient	.248**	.218**	.280**	.132	.312**	.365**	.356**	1	.390**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.01	<.001	.12	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001
		N	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140
	PRCA_ Interper sonal_ MEAN	Correlation coefficient	.187*	.144	.295**	.204*	.269**	.509**	.466**	.390**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.027	.089	<.001	.015	.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	
		N	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The PRCA-24 measures show meaningful correlations between the sections. Group mean and interpersonal mean have a strong positive correlation (ρ=.509, p<.001), indicating that as general CA increases, interpersonal apprehension tends to increase too. The mean for meeting and public speaking are moderately correlated (ρ=.356, p<.001), showing a moderate relationship between group and public speaking apprehension. Interpersonal mean is correlated with all PRCA-24 sections, with all values above .390 (p<.001), highlighting its strong connection across different types of apprehension. These findings emphasize the interconnectedness of communication strategies (OPSI factors) and different types of CA (PRCA-24). They suggest that improving one aspect of communication, such as SA or FO, may positively influence others, potentially reducing apprehension across diverse contexts.

It can be concluded that there are strong interconnections between the OPSI factors, indicating that strategies such as SA, FO, and AO approaches often complement and reinforce each other. NV strategies and message reduction techniques also play significant roles, particularly in situations where learners might adapt their communication to manage apprehension. These findings suggest that learners who rely heavily on one set of strategies are likely to integrate other approaches as well in managing communication challenges.

In terms of CA, the data reveals that certain OPSI factors, such as SA, AO, and NV strategies, are more closely associated with apprehension in group, public speaking, and interpersonal settings. This suggests that these strategies are not only critical for improving communication but also serve as tools for managing anxiety. The findings also emphasize a strong interrelationship among different types of CA, indicating that individuals experiencing anxiety in one domain, such as group interactions, are likely to encounter similar challenges in interpersonal or public speaking situations. The findings align with previous studies that found a positive relationship between communication strategies and fear of oral presentation [9], [10], [12].

3.4. Discussion

The evidence of CA across different communication contexts highlights the challenges faced by Japanese EFL learners. In addition, the prevalence of moderate CA also highlights the importance of addressing the learners' communication anxiety in the current pedagogical approaches. The findings reveal that Japanese cultural norms might have contributed towards CA in group discussions and meetings. For example, the concept of saving face and fear of negative evaluation, which is central to Japanese culture, might have heightened the CA in group discussions and meetings. This is corroborated by earlier studies that found East Asian learners' high levels of anxiety in language learning was due to the fear of making mistakes and losing face [9], [10], [12], [24]–[26]. The Japanese collectivism culture also plays a role in CA among the learners. Furthermore, the practice of self-reflection and self-criticism, which is typical of East Asian culture, could have led to the exacerbated CA as learners strive for perfection. Yashima *et al.* [27] in their study found that excessive reflection practice of '*hansei*' in Japanese culture can heighten CA. Another related aspect to CA is largely contributed by the Japanese educational system that focuses on grammar and written exams over oral communication. Other studies have found that limited exposure to oral practices in the classroom has caused CA in speaking tasks [28], [29].

These findings seem to indicate an interplay between CA and oral presentation strategies among the Japanese EFL learners. The high use of MRA strategies, for example, implies that learners prefer simplicity and familiarity in performing the oral presentation tasks. However, this may raise the issue of learners' ability to develop their language skills. In addition, cultural norms like self-reflection and striving for perfectionism may have contributed towards the high use of AO strategies that focus on accuracy and self-correction. Moreover, the findings show strong correlations between social affection and NV strategies, implying that Japanese cultural values of maintaining group harmony might influence their employment of the oral communication strategies [9], [10], [17], [21].

In the light of correlations between learners' CA and strategy use in oral presentation, there is a need for pedagogical strategies that align with Japanese cultural values. Previous researchers [30], [31] suggested leveraging the cultural factors to reduce CA in the classroom. Freiermuth and Huang [31] proposed employing group-based tasks and collaborative learning activities that align with Japanese collectivist values that emphasize on peer support and building learners' confidence. Along the same line, Dörnyei [30] suggested creating a supportive classroom that can reduce fear of negative evaluation.

These findings indicate critical implications for integrating pedagogical measures that respect Japanese cultural values while addressing CA. Curriculum designers should incorporate culturally relevant strategies, such as group tasks and indirect communication methods, to foster a supportive learning environment. Previous studies demonstrate that group-based activities and collaborative learning strategies can cultivate a positive atmosphere for language development by alleviating anxiety and enhancing confidence [30], [31]. Building on these insights, the findings from this study can guide educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers in creating supportive learning environments that integrate culturally adapted pedagogies, including collaborative learning, peer assistance, and structured oral communication practices. In addition, implementing student-centered teaching strategies, such as allowing students to choose

topics of personal interest for presentations, could further increase motivation and reduce anxiety. English language instructors should also consider incorporating technological tools like presentation software, online practice platforms, and feedback mechanisms to provide students with opportunities to rehearse and receive constructive criticism in a low-pressure setting.

4. CONCLUSION

The present study has unveiled the significant impact of CA in oral presentations among Japanese EFL learners. Despite reforms in English education and the vast literature on the strategies learners employ to overcome their apprehensions and difficulties with oral presentations, many Japanese EFL learners continue to struggle with oral communication. By identifying the coping strategies of EFL learners and how they are connected to CA, the study has highlighted the influence of Japanese cultural norms on the learners' communication anxiety. The findings indicate a moderate level of CA across different communication contexts. Within the category of high level of CA, interpersonal communication ranks as the most anxiety-inducing, while public speaking has the fewest respondents expressing discomfort. This indicates that CA can arise in both formal settings, like public speaking, and informal ones, like interpersonal communication, and it may be affected by self-confidence and language proficiency. In terms of oral presentation strategies, the findings show that MRA are mostly used due to the learners' tendency to use familiar words as their coping mechanism which results in simpler expressions. Meanwhile, nonverbal communication is the least used strategy as learners are also less likely to focus on their nonverbal cues while communicating their message. The findings also indicate that the strong and moderate positive correlations highlight the interconnectedness between communication strategies and different types of CA. This suggests that improving one aspect of communication can positively influence and help reduce apprehension in other areas.

Future research should consider investigating the influence of culturally adapted pedagogy on the long-term mitigation of CA and the development of oral proficiency. It should also explore how technology can foster confident oral communication through online platforms and interactive speech tools that are designed to alleviate CA. By addressing these gaps, educators and curriculum designers can refine their approaches to better support learners in reducing CA and enhancing fluency. In sum, this study illustrates the delicate connection between CA and oral presentation strategies. A culturally responsive instructional model would enable educators to help Japanese EFL learners acquire fluency and confidence for effective communication.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

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C : **C**onceptualization
M : **M**ethodology
So : **So**ftware
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D : **D**ata Curation
O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft
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Vi : **Vi**sualization
Su : **Su**pervision
P : **P**roject administration
Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The research related to human use has been complied with all the relevant national regulations and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by UiTM Research Ethics Committee ref number 600-UITMKPH(PJI.5/2/4/12) (82).

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that supports the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author [RAA], upon reasonable request.

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