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Undergraduate Law Students' Perceptions of Oral Presentations as a Form of Assessment

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ABSTRACT

Oral presentations are considered to be effective teaching tools because they add variety to the process of teaching and learning in the classroom. Through these presentations, students are given the opportunity to learn from one another instead of always learning from the lecturer. There is no doubt that communication skills are core skills needed by those in the legal profession. Despite this, the use of oral presentations as a form of assessment is yet to become an integral part of courses in legal studies. This study examines students' perceptions of oral presentations as a form of assessment in their undergraduate law program with the sole purpose of identifying the benefits obtained, the challenges faced and the relationship between these as well as gender and year of study with students' attitude towards oral presentations as a form of assessment. The data for the study was collected by conducting a survey using Likert scale among students pursuing an undergraduate law program. The findings add to the literature on the teaching and learning of legal studies and advances further use of oral presentations as a form of assessment. This is because the researchers are of the opinion that a combination of a summative written exam and assessed oral presentations will create an authentic learning context where the skills developed will enhance students' development of a professional identity in the legal arena.

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INTRODUCTION

The hallmark of the law profession is the ability and disposition to engage problems,

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make arguments, evaluate options, and render opinions using skillful reasoning. According to Cantley-Smith (2006), communication skills are the most important tools of a competent, professional lawyer and well developed oral communication skills are required in the adversarial environment of litigation lawyers and in almost all other aspects of legal professional practice. He went on to add that the ability to converse on complex legal and related issues with fluency, accuracy and effectiveness is not only desirable, but virtually mandatory to a successful professional life as a lawyer. In line with this, Greig (2000) argued that we should not only focus on 'what lawyers need to know' but also incorporated a wider range of objectives including the need to promote and develop students' social and interpersonal skills. This parallels with the views of Christensen and Kift (2000) who identified communication as an important graduate attribute to ensure graduates were able to communicate both orally and in writing using the appropriate language in a clear, appropriate manner in a variety of contexts. The authors went on to advocate that the law curriculum should integrate generic and specific skills training with the existing drive towards traditional knowledge acquisition. Despite this, there are counter arguments from some scholars comprising of teachers and legal professional members who claim that these skills need not be taught as these skills are acquired in contexts outside the university. Christensen and Kift (2000) countered these arguments by asserting they were at odds with the attitude of the wider university community and employer groups which had called for the necessity to integrate oral presentations into the teaching and learning of law studies. For the purpose of this paper, oral presentations are limited to academic presentations where students are required to conduct research on topics that are selected by the students and approved/assigned by the teacher/lecturer. The objectives of the oral presentations are to either inform or persuade the class on specific issues which will then be followed with a Q & A session and end with the teacher/lecturer's feedback.

Despite the importance of oral communication skills to the legal profession, many undergraduate law students around the world complete their entire tertiary education without being provided opportunities to orally discuss or present their knowledge and understanding of the law. Further, they are also not tested on these skills through formal oral assessment tasks. Cantley-Smith (2006) considered this outcome as shocking because a successful career in professional legal practice depended solely on the ability of the lawyers to defend their clients' claims/ positions effectively in the court room. This is also in line with the Vignaendra Report (Vignaendra & Centre for Legal Education [CLE], 1998) which listed communication skills amongst the most frequently used skills of law graduates in any type of law related employment. This report was initiated by the Center for Legal Education to survey the career destinations of two cohorts of Australian law graduates who had finished an undergraduate law degree.

Further, according to DeJarnatt (2001), collaborative and collective work is crucial in defining issues, creating documents, negotiating and resolving legal disputes where lawyers are required to discuss their writing with their target audience as well as with their colleagues. He concluded by stating that many thoughtful people in several fields have explored the relationship between speech and writing - what it is and how it affects learning and teaching - but there has been surprisingly little discussion of these issues in the context of law school teaching.

Since there is a lot of concern in reference to the use of oral presentations as a form of assessment, this paper aims to study the effectiveness of oral presentations as an assessment tool in an undergraduate law program from the students' perspectives. It further elicits information on the benefits obtained and challenges faced by students when oral presentations are used as part of the overall assessment of their academic performance. It also focuses on the factors that affect the students' attitude towards this form of assessment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Joughin (2010), 'oral assessment' includes any assessment of student learning that is conducted, wholly or in part, by word of mouth. He went on to add that it dominated assessment up until at least the 18th century at Oxford and Cambridge and continues to be a principal mode of assessment in many European countries while in the UK and Australia, it is ubiquitous. Oral communication skills are indisputably a key component of effective lawyering. Yet, in most doctrinal courses, law students are seldom assessed on their ability to integrate issue spotting and legal analysis into an oral communication format. Shultz and Zedeck (2011) identified twenty-six factors important to effective lawyering which included factors such as "analysis and reasoning; creativity and innovation; problem solving; practical judgment; researching the law; fact finding, questioning and interviewing; influencing and advocating; writing; speaking; listening; negotiation skills; the ability to see the world through the eyes of others; diligence; and self-development". In regards to these skills, it has been advocated that the role of teaching essential skills such as oral communication skills in higher education is to prepare students to be more effective employees and responsible citizens. As stated, the findings of the Vignaendra Report, (Vignaendra & CLE, 1998) listed communication skills amongst the most frequently used skills of law graduates in any type of law related employment. This is supported by Morley (2001) who claimed that oral presentation skills were essential for employability. The necessity to include communication skills in tertiary education has been repeated in numerous other reports. Tuan and Neomy (2007), for example had also confirmed that it was a requirement in higher education for students to be equipped with advance written and oral skills. Further, according to Fallows and Steven (2000), today's challenging economic situation

requires new graduates to not only have knowledge of an academic subject but also gain skills which will enhance their prospects of employment. They went on to say employability skills include the following abilities: 'the retrieval and handling of information; communication and presentation; planning and problem solving; and social development and interaction, creative thinking, problem solving, critical thinking, active and reflective application of knowledge.

It must be noted at this point that there is a fine line dividing oral communication and oral presentations. Oral communication refers to all forms of communications, inclusive one to one as well as to a larger audience. It can occur in formal and informal situations. However, oral presentations take place in a formal situation which is planned and has specific presentation tools such as power point slides for it is done with more than one person. Further, there is specific purpose to the presentations unlike oral communication which can take place impromptu. In the context of teaching and learning in academic institutions, it has been argued that the Socratic dialogue common in most first year courses challenges students to think on their feet, but the method does not teach students how to describe their research path, explain the analysis of a client's legal issue, or make a recommendation on a course of action using the spoken word on an individual basis. This is because the Socratic dialogue is a formal method by which a small group (5-15 people), guided by a facilitator, finds a precise answer to a universal question by involving group decision-making by consensus (Marinoff, 2009). As a result, lack of adequate oral skills has become an area of concern, as the ability to participate constructively in conversations about the law is an essential skill for students to acquire during law school. However, the importance of good oral communication skills is often overlooked although a survey of new attorneys rated these skills as more important than writing skills (Korn, 2004). Without an effective way to communicate orally, law students' knowledge of the law and their critical thinking can get lost in boring, repetitive and rambling presentations of legal materials.

Having understood the necessity for including oral presentations in legal studies, the subsequent question that is much debated would be on the issues related to assessing oral presentations. Black and Williams (1998) defined assessment to include all activities that students undertook in the classroom that could be used to modify students' learning. According to Pearce and Lee (2009), the skills that are usually evaluated in oral presentations are knowledge of the subject, confidence, conciseness of the responses, quality of responses, thinking on the spot, communication skills, application of theory to practice, ability to handle questions, body language, professional mannerism and clarity of responses. According to Curcio (2009), the current methods of assessing potential lawyers involve testing of a very narrow range of skills and assessing those skills within an equally narrow range of test

methodologies. These assessment methods have repeatedly been critiqued as inadequate and inaccurate ways to develop and assess the skills and values that new lawyers need to practice law competently. UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education [QAA] (2012) connoted the preference for using more than one assessment method unless there was a compelling reason to only use one. Henry (2012) examined the changing nature of assessments in UK universities and identified that more and more universities were using non-traditional assessment methods in preference to written exams.

Despite the necessity for developing oral presentation skills via activities incorporating oral assessments in courses, oral examination itself has been criticized by many authors for lack of reliability. According to Joughin (2010), reliability is concerned with how dependent a student's result could be on the case or scenario given to the student for examination, the level of difficulty of the follow up questions that are asked to the student after presentation, who examines them and whether an examiner's assessment could change over a period of time in examining a large number of students. He went on to add that the examiners in an oral examination participated actively in the examination process and their participation could introduce a bias. This is also confirmed by Davis and Karunathilake (2005), who claimed that an examiner might have bias towards students' appearance, ethnicity or background. Another criticism is that oral examination can also be threatening to candidates with potentially poor performance due to the stress involved in oral assessments. In addition to these criticisms, past literature has also raised numerous concerns related to the use of oral presentations as a form of assessment. Researchers such as Alwi and Sidhu (2013), Chuang (2009), and El Enein (2011) had identified a number of difficulties faced by students in oral presentations such as anxiety or fear of speaking. Further, a number of studies have also identified the reasons for students' poor performance in oral presentations. Turner et al. (2012) as well as Akindele and Trennepohl (2014) classified these reasons into three categories:

- Personal traits – e.g. shyness, fear of facing an audience, self-confidence and physical appearance.
- Instruction – e.g. negative evaluations, hard questions, humiliating feedback, etc.
- Lack of presentation skills – e.g. researching, planning, organizing, practicing and presenting.

METHODOLOGY

In essence, this research was done using a quantitative research method. It is clearly advocated that this kind of research involves the investigation of some problem or question which is 'social' in nature involving techniques of data collection that are similar to those used in social science researches. The main objective of this research is to identify the effectiveness of oral presentations as a form of assessment in an undergraduate law program from the

students' perspectives. In line with this, four research questions were designed and they are as follows:

1. How do undergraduate law students perceive oral presentations as a form of assessment in their program?
2. What are the benefits reaped by undergraduate law students from oral presentations?
3. What are the challenges faced by undergraduate law students in oral presentations?
4. What are the skills enhanced by the use of oral presentations as perceived by undergraduate law students?

In order to answer these research questions, a quantitative research is deemed as most effective. According to Creswell (2018), a quantitative research method deals with statistical, mathematical or numerical data where data is collected through primary research from a large sample size and analyzed using statistical software. Accordingly, the researchers collected the data using a survey questionnaire. A non-probability purposive sampling method was adopted. The sample chosen was undergraduate law students pursuing a law degree in a public university in Malaysia. The questionnaire was distributed to 200 undergraduate students in Year 1 to Year 4 and 178 usable questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS. The questionnaire was divided into six parts which are Section A to Section F comprising of demographic details, students' past experience with oral presentations, students' perception of oral presentations as a form of assessment, benefits of oral presentations, challenges faced in oral presentations and students' attitude towards oral presentations. The questionnaire was designed using the Likert-type scale. According to La Marca (2011), Likert–type scale is a scale that can be easily read and understood by the respondents and it also enables the researchers to easily construct and manage the data. A pilot test of the survey questionnaire was conducted on 30 respondents to identify flaws in the questionnaire. According to Crossman (2017), a pilot study is a research activity that is conducted on a limited scale that allows researchers to get a clearer idea of what they want to know and how they can best find it out without the expense and

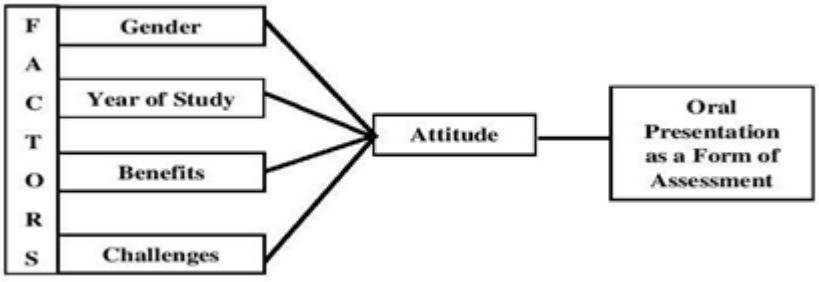


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of study

effort of a full-fledged study. It also enablesd researchers to identify and rectify any flaws in the questionnaire. The researchers used the conceptual framework as shown in Figure 1 to understand undergraduate law students' perceptions of oral presentations as a form of assessment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section will discuss the findings of the survey conducted among undergraduate law students to identify their perceptions of oral presentations as a form of assessment in a law program. Prior to the discussion of the findings, a brief description of the demographics related to the sample used in the study is given. The sample comprised both male and female students. The demographics of the respondents are shown in Table 1.

The findings indicate that a total of 21.3% (n = 38) of the respondents were males and 78.7% (n = 140) were females. For the purpose of this survey, the age of the respondents was not taken into consideration as part of the demography as law programs do not impose any restriction on age for entry requirement.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the respondents according to the year of study. The reason for identifying the year of study is to investigate whether there are any differences in the perception of students on oral presentations as a form of assessment in the different years of study with the continuous exposure to oral presentations in their courses.

Table 1

Gender distribution of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	38	21.3
Female	140	78.7
Total	178	100.0

Table 2

Distrubution of respondents' year of study

Year	Frequency	Percentage (%)
First Year	53	29.8
Second Year	67	37.6
Third Year	42	23.6
Fourth Year	16	9.0
Total	178	100.0

Before proceeding to elucidate responses from the respondents on their perception of oral presentations as a form of assessment, the researchers sought some background information from the respondents on their exposure to oral presentations as a form of assessment in the courses taught in their law program. Table 3 depicts the findings.

As indicated in Table 3, eight statements were given to the respondents where they had to indicate their agreement or disagreement. High positive responses were noted for four of the statements with 98.3% agreeing that oral presentations were used as a form of assessment in their program, 87.6% agreeing that this type of assessment is beneficial to them, 78.7% agreeing that oral presentations are effective for assessing their academic progress and 77.5% stating that oral presentation assessments should be made compulsory in all law courses. Although a high percentage of the respondents agreed that oral presentations are utilized in their program, less than 50% agreed that it is adopted in all their courses. This finding is contradictory to the common belief that oral presentations are a common part of many courses at colleges and universities as they are one of the ways to improve learning of course material. An interesting finding noted from the survey is that the respondents did not discriminate between individual and group oral presentations. The respondents also did not show a higher preference for oral (45.5%) over written (54.5%) assessments. Since the difference is only 9%, there is no evidence that written assessments are better than oral presentation assessments or vice versa. A majority of the respondents (88.8%) indicated that oral assessments contribute to less than 50% towards the overall marks of each course.

Having obtained information on respondents' past experience of oral presentations as a form of assessment, the

Table 3

Students' past experiences of oral presentations

Experience	Yes	No
Oral presentations form a part of assessment in the program.	98.3	1.7
Oral presentations are a part of assessment in all your courses.	49.4	50.6
Oral presentations contribute more than 50% to the total assessment.	11.2	88.8
Oral presentations should be compulsory assessments in law courses.	77.5	22.5
Oral presentations are effective forms of assessments.	78.7	21.3
Having oral presentation assessments are beneficial to students.	87.6	12.4
Oral presentation assessments are better than written assessments.	45.5	54.5
Group oral presentations are better than individual oral presentations.	55.6	44.4

researchers went on to elicit information on their attitude towards this form of assessment. Table 4 shows the findings of this.

The findings indicate moderately high positive responses for only two of the statements given; 66.9% agreed that use of oral presentations as a form of assessment enhanced their ability to remember better and 63.5% agreed that they appreciated oral presentations more when they had autonomy over the selection of topic. On the other hand, only 59.5 % agreed that individual oral presentations were suitable for law students. Further, an average of 51.1% agreed that they enjoyed participating in oral presentations while 11.3% disagreed. Similarly, an average percentage of 50.5% respondents agreed that they found it easier to learn through oral presentations while 21.9% disagreed. 50% of the respondents also claimed that they did better quality research when oral presentations were used. It was unanticipated that a large percentage of respondents chose a neutral stand to the statement of enjoying the subject more when oral presentations were used. To understand this further, 10% of the respondents randomly chosen were questioned individually as to why some students would chose this stand. The majority responded that they were bogged with too many assignments, tests as well as oral presentation tasks which resulted in them not being able to truly distinguish their level of enjoyment towards the different

Table 4

Undergraduate law students' attitude towards oral presentation

Attitude	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)
Enjoy participating in oral presentations	11.3	37.6	51.1
Have more interest in the subject when oral presentations are given.	23.0	37.6	39.3
Find it easier to learn through oral presentations.	21.9	27.5	50.5
Do better quality research when oral presentations are involved.	20.8	29.2	50.0
Tend to remember more when oral presentations are used.	12.9	20.2	66.9
Prefer individual more than group oral presentations.	27.5	33.1	39.3
Enjoy the subject more when there are oral presentations involved.	21.9	46.1	32.0
Like oral presentations because can make more friends.	39.3	38.8	21.9
Think individual oral presentations are very suitable for law students.	14.6	25.8	59.5
Like oral presentations more when options are given for choosing topic.	11.2	25.3	63.5

types of assessments. This view is shared by the researchers who have gone through a similar program earlier. Table 5 shows the findings of the law students' perceptions on oral presentations as a form of assessment.

The findings of the survey on the respondents' perceptions of oral presentations as a form of assessment revealed high levels of agreement. Out of the 10 positive statements given, respondents agreed to all the statements with very high percentages ranging from 84.2% to 98.9%. The statements given were all worded positively reflecting the positive impact of the use of oral presentations as a form of assessment. These included views that oral presentation assessments are efficient in terms of occupying students' time, reliable as a form of assessment, removes stress, effective in testing students' knowledge and application, effective in testing individual students' knowledge of materials studied, prevents cheating and plagiarism, caters for students' individuality and expression, assess different range of skills and abilities as well as enable students to develop and improve verbal abilities on legal matters. The high percentages of agreement are conclusive of students' overall positive outlook on the use of oral presentations as a form of assessment. One important point to note is that the statements that state oral presentations assess different range of skills and abilities as well oral presentation assessments enable students to develop and improve their verbal abilities had the highest percentage of agreement, 98.8% and 98.9% respectively. Table 6 shows the findings of the benefits of oral presentations to undergraduate law students.

Table 5

Undergraduate law students' perceptions on oral presentation as a form of assessment

Perceptions	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
Oral presentation assessments are efficient in terms of occupying students' time.	96.6	3.4
Oral presentations are reliable forms of assessment.	96.1	3.9
Oral presentation assessments remove the stress of having to memorize lots of facts and figures.	84.2	15.7
Oral presentation assessments effectively test how well students can use and apply information.	97.2	2.8
Oral presentation assessments assess individual students' abilities adequately.	96.7	3.4
Oral presentation assessments test individual students' knowledge of materials studied during the course effectively.	96.6	3.4
Oral presentation assessments prevent cheating and plagiarism.	87.7	12.4
Oral presentation assessments allow for student's individuality and expression.	97.8	2.2
Oral presentation assessments assess different range of skills and abilities.	98.8	1.1
Oral presentation assessments enable students to develop and improve their verbal abilities on legal matters.	98.9	1.1

Table 6

Benefits of oral presentations to undergraduate law students

Benefits	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)
Oral presentations reduce biases and promotes considering and understanding different perspectives of legal issues.	24.2	37.6	38.2
Oral presentations help students learn to use evidence and data to support their arguments and viewpoints.	9.0	23.0	68.0
Oral presentations help learners realize that issues are not merely black and/or white.	8.4	28.1	63.5
Students learn to be open-minded and accept reasonable criticisms through oral presentations.	5.6	18.5	75.8
Students learn to question everything via oral presentations.	19.7	26.4	53.9
Students learn to take or change position based on evidence in oral presentations.	13.5	33.1	53.4
Oral presentations help students learn to seek precise and credible information.	15.2	24.2	60.7
Oral presentations help students learn to take the entire situation into account.	12.9	28.9	58.4
Students learn to look for options and search for reasons via oral presentations.	12.3	23.0	64.6
Oral presentations improve oral communication and argumentation skills.	6.1	11.2	82.6

In response to the statements on the benefits of oral presentations to students, the respondents agreed to all the statements on a scale ranging from 53.4% to 82.6% with only one statement having below 50% of agreement. The statement that had the lowest percentage of agreement is the one which stated that oral presentations reduce biases and promotes considering and understanding different perspectives of legal issues with 38.2% agreeing, 24.2% disagreeing and 37.6% taking a neutral stand. Since this finding was inconsistent with the rest of the findings which viewed the use of oral presentations as a form assessment as being very beneficial, the researchers elicited further information on this by questioning a few of the respondents selected randomly through an informal face to face session. The responses given were all almost similar with them claiming there were no significant differences between the various modes of assessment in terms of reducing biases and promoting the need to consider and understand the legal issues from different perspectives. This can also be taken to be the reason for the 37.6% of the respondents choosing the neutral option. The benefits which were agreed by the majority of the respondents (75.8%) were that through oral presentations, students learnt to be open-minded and accepted reasonable criticism and that oral presentations improved oral communication and argumentation skills

(82.6%). These findings are consistent with past literature for example Girard et al. (2011) had asserted that students could gain knowledge not only from the research they and other students performed, but also by observing the other presenters' strengths and weaknesses to develop better communication and presentation skills. Other statements on the benefits which also indicated high positive responses were that oral presentations helped students learnt to use evidence and data to support arguments and viewpoints (68%), they help learners realized that issues were not clear and some could fall under a gray area (63.5%), they helped students learnt to seek precise and credible information (60.7%) and students learn to look for options and search for reasons via oral presentations (64.6%). Other benefits that were agreed upon are students learn to question everything via oral presentations (53.9%), students learn to take or change position based on evidence given in oral presentations (53.4%) and lastly oral presentations help students learn to take the entire situation into account (58.4%).

Besides asking the respondents as to the benefits obtained through the use of oral presentations as a form of assessment, they were also requested to identify the challenges that they faced in oral presentations. Table 7 shows the findings of this question.

In terms of challenges, the researchers identified a list of challenges that have been highlighted in past researches on the effectiveness of oral presentations. Although these researches were done in other fields such as Sciences, Engineering and other

Table 7

Challenges faced by undergraduate law students in oral presentations

Challenges	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)
Lack of presentation skills causes unnecessary stress and results in poor performance.	10.6	23.6	65.7
Fear of facing the audience and the instructor.	15.1	20.8	64.0
Lack of proper training on oral presentations prior to oral presentation assessments causes lack of motivation and confidence.	12.3	21.9	65.7
When choice of topic for oral presentation is determined by the instructor, students face discomfort and lack of interest.	11.2	35.4	53.4
Lack of time to research adequately on the topics for oral presentations.	10.6	19.7	69.7
Marks awarded does not commensurate effort and time spent for preparation of oral presentations.	13.0	27.5	59.6
Assessor fails to give constructive feedback for future improvement.	30.9	34.8	34.3
Absence of permanent record of oral presentations to assist students in future improvement.	15.1	33.1	51.7
Finding time for meetings for group oral presentations to achieve oral presentation goals.	10.7	20.8	68.6
After oral presentations, groups disbanded without reflecting on their work which defeated proper learning.	15.2	24.7	60.1

Social Science subjects and not in law programs specifically, the researchers are of the opinion that the challenges would also be the same when oral presentations are used as a form of assessment in legal studies. Among the challenges identified and put forth to seek the respondents' perceptions include; unnecessary stress is faced resulting in poor performance, fear in facing the audience, lack of proper training in oral presentation skills, topics chosen by the instructors are not of interest to students, lack of time, marks given do not commensurate effort and time spent on oral presentations, no permanent record to guide future efforts, difficulty in finding time to meet for group oral presentations and lack of reflection after oral presentations. When these challenges were given to the respondents for feedback by way of agreement or disagreement, the respondents agreed that they did face similar challenges except for the challenge that the assessor failed to give constructive feedback with only 34.3% agreeing to it. This low percentage of agreement indicates that the lecturers do give feedback. The importance of feedback is also highlighted by King (2002) who suggested that teachers should hold question and answer session, provide feedback and evaluation of students' performance. The rest of the challenges presented in the survey questionnaires had a percentage of agreement between the ranges of 51.7% to 69.7%. The highest percentage of agreement (69.7%) was that students found that the duration given for preparing for oral presentations was insufficient. This is supported by past researches where it was held one of the disadvantages of oral presentations was that it took a considerable amount of time to prepare (Bartsch & Cobern, 2003; Brown et al., 2004). It must also be noted here that 64% of the respondents agreed that fear of facing the audience and the instructor as a challenge that they faced. This is similar to Wolfe's (2008) findings where it was shown that the worst challenge was the fear of public speaking. Thus, it can be concluded that the challenges faced by students in oral presentations are similar despite the difference in subjects/programs in which they are used as a form of assessment.

In addition to identifying benefits and challenges faced by the students when oral presentations are used as a form of assessment, the researchers also identified students' views on the skills that were enhanced through this form of assessment. Based on past literature, the respondents were given a list of skills that have been perceived to be enhanced through the use of oral presentations as a form of assessment. The skills that were identified are inter cultural communication, interpersonal communication, leadership skills, academic development, time management, self-development, teamwork, intrapersonal communication, digital literacy, thinking and problem solving. The respondents were asked to select three skills that they felt were developed the most. Figure 2 shows the finding.

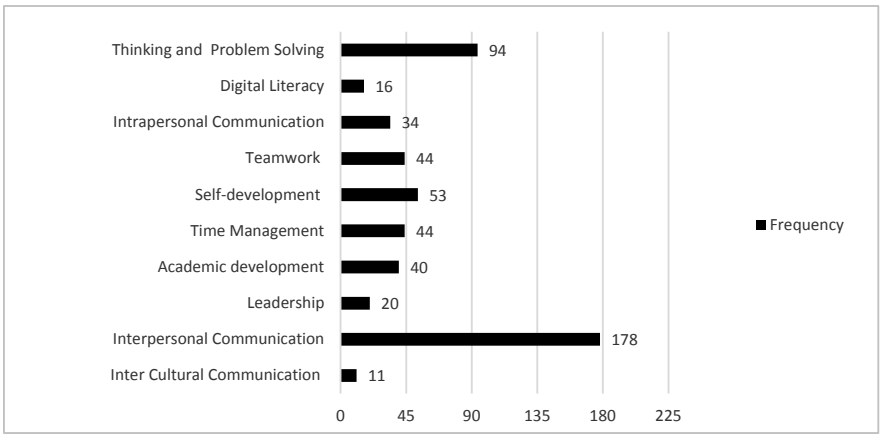


Figure 2. Perception of skills enhanced through oral presentations

The findings in Figure 2 indicate that all the respondents were in consensus that the skill developed the most through the use of oral presentations as a form of assessment was interpersonal communication (frequency count: 178). This is consistent with King (2002) who asserted that oral presentations given in a class was one of the activities that enhanced students' proficiency level. The skill that was perceived as important after interpersonal communication is thinking and problem solving (frequency count: 94). On the other hand, the skill that was selected the least was Inter Cultural Communication (frequency count: 11). When further analysis was done with selected respondents in an informal face to face session, it came to light that the university does not have international students in their undergraduate programs. It also came to the knowledge of the researchers that the respondents had interpreted the skill "inter cultural communication" as communication between them and international students and not between the different ethnic groups in Malaysia. Digital literacy and leadership skills were also not selected by many with a frequency count of 16 and 20 respectively. The reason given for this in the informal face to face session was that most of the oral presentation assessments were done individually and the only technology allowed was PowerPoint slides. It must be noted that the reason given by the students actually supports King's (2002) comment that the availability of cameras, slide, project, PowerPoint, VCD/DVD and other visual aids would make oral presentations more exciting and interesting. However, since the use of technology was limited to power point only, the students claimed that their digital skills were not enhanced greatly. Further, leadership skills were also not enhanced because most of their oral presentations were done on an individual basis. The researchers also conducted a Pearson Correlations test to identify the relationship between the factors affecting

student's attitude towards oral presentations as a form of assessment. Table 8 shows the findings.

The Pearson correlation test carried out indicates that there is no significant relationship between gender (r=-0.061), year of study (r=0.074) and challenges (r=-0.144) with the students' attitude towards oral presentations as a form of assessment. This means there is no significant difference between females and males attitude towards oral presentations as a form of assessment. Further, the Pearson Correlation test also indicates there is no significant relationship between year of study and attitude towards oral presentations as a form of assessment. The finding from the Pearson Correlation test which indicated that the challenges faced by students in oral presentation assessments did not significantly influence their attitude was unexpected as it is generally advocated that attitude towards a task is greatly affected by the depth of challenge experienced in the particular task. The result proved that there was a positive correlation (r=0.460, sig. level=0.000) between benefits attained from oral presentation assessments with students' attitude towards this type of assessment. Thus, this means that students' attitude is more positive towards the use of oral presentation assessments when they perceive that there are more benefits in this form of assessment.

Table 8

Relationship between the factors affecting student's attitude towards oral presentations as a form of assessment

Correlations		Gender	Year of Study	Benefits	Challenges	Attitude
Gender	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.081	0.029	0.064	-0.061
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.284	0.697	0.393	0.419
	N	178	178	178	178	178
Year of Study	Pearson Correlation		1	0.116	0.001	0.074
	Sig. (2-tailed)			0.122	0.985	0.324
	N		178	178	178	178
Benefits	Pearson Correlation			1	0.131	0.460**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				0.081	0.000
	N			178	178	178
Challenges	Pearson Correlation				1	-0.144
	Sig. (2-tailed)					0.056
	N				178	178
Attitude	Pearson Correlation					1
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N					178

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

The researchers also included an open-ended question as the last part of the survey questionnaire where respondents were asked to suggest two ways in which the use of oral presentations as a form of assessment in their programs can be enhanced. The students gave a multitude of diverse views. In order to ensure reliability of analysis and to remove subjectivity of interpretation, the researchers analyzed the responses and coded them with the help of two inter raters. The responses were coded into 5 distinct categories; increase marks allocated for oral presentation assessments, do more individual rather than group oral presentations, students should be given autonomy to select group members and topics, constructive feedback should be given after presentation and ample time should be given for preparation. The findings are shown in Figure 3.

This question was an optional question and as such, some of the respondents did not give any response. Among the ones who responded, the suggestion that lecturers should give ample time to students to prepare for the assessment was the highest with 32 respondents. According to Chivers and Shoolbred (2007), one of the characteristics that is important to ensure oral presentations are effective is careful planning and preparation and to do this, students should be given sufficient time. They went on to claim that insufficient time could create pressure and affect quality of presentation. The second highest recommendation (22 respondents) was for lecturers to allow students to select their own topics and group members rather than being assigned into a group with a specific topic by the lecturer. According to Rivers (1968), when a teacher chooses a topic that

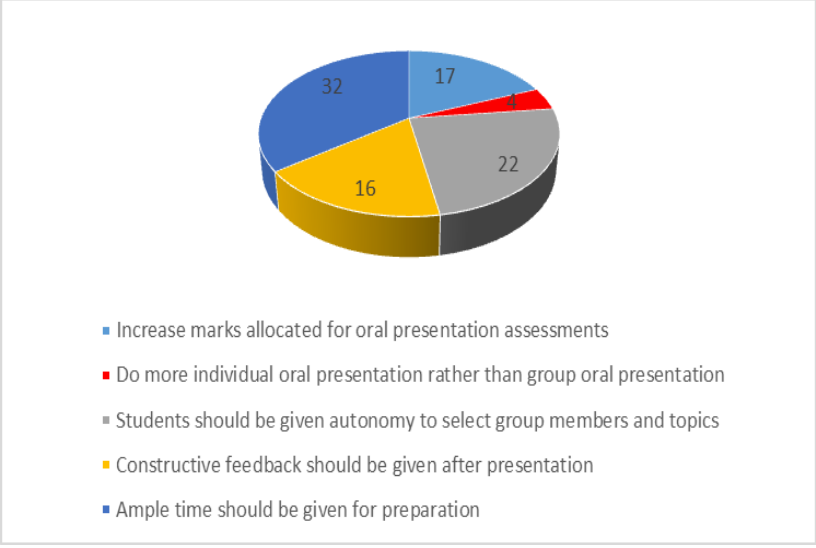


Figure 3. Respondents' recommendation for improving the use of oral presentations as a form of assessment

is uncongenial or about which the students have little knowledge, it will create difficulty for the students to give good presentations. The recommendation given by the students to be allowed to choose their own group members is supported by Sisto (2009). Similarly, Zivkovic (2014) viewed that in oral presentations, students were involved in their own learning process as active participants. They added that the students are engaged in real-world experience, and they build creative and critical thinking and problem-solving skills which are important characteristics for success in the 21st century and as such they should be given autonomy to choose both topic and group. The other recommendations made are to increase marks allocated for oral presentation assessments (17 respondents), that constructive feedback should be given after presentation (16 respondents) and to do more individual oral presentations rather than group oral presentations (4 respondents).

CONCLUSIONS

Oral communication skills transcend almost all aspects of legal and non-legal professional practice. In this sense, oral communication can be described as a generic and also readily transferable or universal skill. The findings of this research have clearly proven that the use of oral presentation assessments in the law program are positively viewed by the students and they are perceived to be beneficial as they enhance core skills needed in a legal profession. Given the fundamental importance of communication skills in most professional environments, requiring some form of oral communication skills training in tertiary law courses is highly desirable. It can be concluded that oral presentations demand a deeper level of knowledge and understanding of particular legal issues. It is recommended that oral assessment tasks should be used effectively throughout tertiary legal education to promote a deeper level of learning and understanding of the law. Unlike the traditional 100 percent assessment based on final examination which encourages short term outcomes such as passing exams with the least amount of student input, oral assessment tasks give rise to many, perhaps less tangible benefits such as increased knowledge, understanding and the acquisition of lifelong learning skills which are crucial to excel in the legal profession. As such, the researchers conclude on a note that oral presentations should be made compulsory for all legal courses. It is also advocated that further research is done on the methods of assessing oral presentation assessments to ensure that the use of this form of assessment is carried out effectively.

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