https://doi.org/10.37708/ezs.swu.bg.v24i2.12

MEDICAL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PRESENTATIONS IN ESP CLASSES

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ABSTRACT: This study examines medical students' perceptions of presentations in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes, focusing on their impact on vocabulary acquisition, fluency, confidence, and anxiety. A mixed-methods design was employed with 96 undergraduate medical students at a Bulgarian university, who completed a post-presentation questionnaire consisting of nine Likert-scale items and three open-ended questions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were examined through thematic analysis. The results indicate that students generally perceive presentations as beneficial for vocabulary development (M = 3.81) and fluency (M = 3.70), while reported anxiety remains moderate (M = 3.30). Structural organization and pronunciation of specialized terminology were not widely identified as major difficulties. Qualitative findings highlight four key themes: vocabulary acquisition, fluency and confidence gains, anxiety and structural challenges, and the value of peer interaction. Students emphasized the importance of rehearsal, active engagement with terminology, and peer feedback in supporting their learning. Overall, the findings suggest that presentations are perceived as an effective pedagogical tool in medical ESP contexts, supporting language development and oral communication skills, despite the persistence of some performance-related anxiety. Targeted instructional support, including structured guidance and peer-based activities, may further enhance their effectiveness.

KEYWORDS: ESP, Medical English, perception, presentation, oral skills, anxiety

Research background

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become indispensable in training medical students to communicate effectively in professional contexts. Unlike general English instruction, ESP programs center on authentic tasks—case briefings, clinical updates, and research presentations—that mirror real-world medical discourse (Дойкова & Добрева/Doykova & Dobreva, 2017). Structured presentations, in particular, demand that learners not only master domain-specific vocabulary but also develop oral fluency, rhetorical competence, and paralinguistic skills such as intonation and pacing (Temirova, 2020).

Early work showed that requiring students to prepare and deliver presentations "forces" deep engagement with complex terminology and proceduralization of speaking skills (Ghasemi & Hajizadeh, 2017). Task-based approaches further emphasize the transformation of written content into oral

narratives, aligning with learner-centered and social constructivist theories (Kılıçkaya & Krajka, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). Studies in non-medical ESP contexts demonstrated robust gains in specialized vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation accuracy, and overall fluency following presentation tasks (Ai et al., 2020; Chirobocea-Tudor, 2018).

More recent research has begun to fine-tune our understanding of how presentations function pedagogically in medical ESP. Deng, Zhou, and Al Shaibani (2022) found that speaking-related anxiety is the most acute barrier for Chinese medical undergraduates, suggesting a critical role for scaffolded presentation practice in reducing stress and building confidence. In a separate study, Song (2024) notes this trend. Panel discussions—an interactive variant of student presentations—have been shown to deepen engagement, critical thinking, and professional communication skills among Iranian and international medical ESP learners (Nasiri & Khojasteh, 2024). Peer-assisted and collaborative strategies also appear highly effective: Al Shihabi et al. (2023) reported significant gains in medical vocabulary and public speaking confidence when students taught and reviewed presentations among themselves, while Kadagidze (2025) documented that 60% of Georgian medical students achieved high confidence in English medical presentations through structured peer and instructor collaboration. Finally, formative peer feedback and low-stakes rehearsal opportunities help mitigate performance anxiety and improve presentation structure and content organization. Alemdag & Narciss (2025) demonstrated that peer review sessions enhanced both language accuracy and learner reflection, and Taylor & Swanberg (2020) found that peer narrative feedback was as valuable as faculty critique for refining oral research presentations. Together, these studies underscore that presentations in medical ESP are not mere assessment tools but holistic learning experiences that integrate vocabulary, fluency, confidence, and critical thinking (Alzahrani & Chaudhary, 2022; DeKeyser & Suzuki, 2025).

Method

A concurrent mixed-methods design was employed to examine the effects of student presentations on ESP learning outcomes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Following ethical approval and informed consent, the instrument—a 9-item Likert-scale questionnaire with open-ended prompts—was first piloted in March 2025 with a group of 20 medical students to assess clarity, internal consistency, and face validity. After refining items based on pilot feedback, the main survey was administered via Google Forms in April–May 2025, immediately after each student delivered their graded presentation. Invitations were distributed via the course management system, and reminders were provided during class to ensure a high response rate.

Quantitative data (nine Likert-scale items; 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree) were exported directly from the survey and coded numerically. Qualitative responses to the open-ended questions were downloaded as plain text for thematic analysis. Descriptive statistics—means, standard deviations, and

frequency distributions—were computed for each survey item to capture overall trends in student perceptions. Simultaneously, thematic analysis of the qualitative responses followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework. The Participants subsection details the composition and proficiency levels of the 96 respondents whose data informed these analyses. Finally, quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated during interpretation to triangulate numerical patterns with illustrative student reflections.

Tools

Data were collected via an online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The survey was created specifically for this study and comprised two sections: a quantitative component with nine Likert-type items and a qualitative component with three open-ended questions. The Likert items asked respondents to rate statements on a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree) covering perceptions of fluency, accuracy, vocabulary acquisition, confidence, anxiety, structural difficulty, pronunciation ability, and comfort with post-presentation Q&A. These items were drawn from established ESP and second-language speaking anxiety measures, adapted to the medical context. The open-ended questions invited students to reflect on what helped or hindered their preparation, describe the most challenging aspects of delivering technical content, and suggest improvements for future presentations. Google Forms automatically recorded response timestamps and ensured anonymity, while its export features facilitated seamless transfer of quantitative data into a spreadsheet for statistical analysis and the compilation of qualitative responses for thematic coding.

Participants

Ninety-six (N = 96) undergraduate students enrolled in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) program at a Bulgarian medical university participated in this study. All were taking an ESP course tailored to medical fields and had completed at least one formal presentation as part of the curriculum. Participants' proficiency in English, as determined by their placement tests, language certificates and academic records, ranged from A2 (elementary) through C1 (advanced), encompassing A2, B1.1, B1, B2, B2 Upper, C1 Advanced, and C1 Advanced Plus levels. The sample included a roughly equal mix of students across these proficiency bands, ensuring that findings reflect diverse linguistic backgrounds and skill levels. Participation was voluntary; all students provided informed consent and were assured of anonymity.

Results

The survey yielded generally positive attitudes toward the use of presentations in the ESP classroom. Quantitatively, mean scores ranged from 1.95 ("I had difficulty structuring my presentation") to 3.81 ("Preparing for my presentation helped me learn new ESP vocabulary"), on a 1–5 scale (1 = Strongly

disagree; 5 = Strongly agree). Specifically, students most strongly agreed that presentations enhanced their ESP vocabulary acquisition (M = 3.81) and improved overall fluency (Q2: M = 3.80; Q1: M = 3.70). Conversely, they least agreed that structuring presentations was challenging (M = 1.95) and reported moderate difficulty with correct pronunciation of specialized terms (M = 2.39). Anxiety about presenting remained moderate (M = 3.30), and comfort with post-presentation Q&A scored slightly above the midpoint (M = 3.38).

The aim of the survey was to check the student's perception on the following:

Fluency (Q1 - "Presentations helped me improve my fluency in ESP"**):** Mean = 3.70 (SD = 1.07). A majority of students (60.4%) agreed that presentations improved their ESP fluency, while only 15.6% disagreed.

Accuracy (Q2 – "Presentations helped me improve my accuracy in ESP"**):** Mean = 3.80 (SD = 1.00). Endorsement for accuracy gains was even stronger, with 62.5% agreeing and 11.5% disagreeing.

Anxiety (Q3 – "Presenting in front of my peers makes me anxious"**):** Mean = 3.30 (SD = 1.25). Responses were mixed: 41.7% agreed that presenting induced anxiety, 30.2% disagreed, and 28.1% felt neutral.

Q&A Comfort (Q4 – "I feel comfortable answering questions after my presentation"**):** Mean = 3.38 (SD = 1.20). Nearly half (48.0%) felt comfortable during the question-and-answer segment, though 26.0% did not.

Vocabulary Acquisition (Q5 – "Preparing for my presentation helped me learn new ESP vocabulary"**):** Mean = 3.81 (SD = 1.01). Students rated vocabulary gains highly, with 62.5% agreeing and only 9.4% in disagreement.

Specialized Vocabulary Use (Q6 – "I can now use more specialized vocabulary in conversations"**):** Mean = 3.78 (SD = 0.99). A strong majority (61.5%) reported improved use of specialized terms in conversation.

Clarity of Complex Concepts (Q7 – "I can explain complex concepts clearly during my presentation"**):** Mean = 3.71 (SD = 1.02). Over half (56.2%) felt able to explain complex ideas clearly, while 11.5% disagreed

Structural Difficulty (Q8 – "I had difficulty structuring my presentation"**):** Mean = 1.95 (SD = 0.84). Most students (76.1%) disagreed that structuring presentations was difficult, indicating structure was not a major barrier.

Pronunciation Difficulty (Q9 – "I have difficulty pronouncing ESP terms correctly"**):** Mean = 2.39 (SD = 1.08). More than half (54.2%) disagreed that they struggled with ESP term pronunciation, though 18.8% did report difficulty.

Thematic analysis of open-ended responses revealed four major themes:

Vocabulary acquisition

Students overwhelmingly reported that the act of researching and preparing presentations deepened their ESP vocabulary knowledge. For example, one student noted, "Maybe if I have more vocabulary knowledge," as key to better preparation, highlighting the direct link between term mastery and confidence in

delivery. Another reflected, “Especially for me, more speaking practice and learning vocabulary would have helped me prepare better,” underscoring how targeted rehearsal fosters retention of specialized terminology. These responses align with the high quantitative score for vocabulary learning (Q5 mean = 3.81), confirming that presentation tasks serve as an effective vehicle for ESP lexicon acquisition.

Fluency and Confidence gains

Many learners described tangible gains in fluency and self-assurance through repeated practice. One remarked, “Honestly, I feel that there’s not much else that could have helped me prepare better. The resources provided … were incredibly beneficial. I was able to … deliver the presentation with confidence,” illustrating how structured preparation translates into smoother, more assured speaking. Others pointed out that “talking more English in my interactions with people” during the process made their oral production “more natural,” echoing the strong quantitative endorsement of fluency improvement (Q2 mean = 3.80). These accounts suggest that presentations not only scaffold linguistic competence but also reinforce learner confidence in spontaneous communication.

Anxiety and Structural Challenges

Despite overall positive sentiment, students still grappled with planning and performance anxiety. A common refrain was difficulty in organizing content: “The most challenging part … was structuring the content in a clear and logical way while also making sure to include all the necessary details”. Concurrently, the emotional toll of public speaking persisted—one student confessed, “Speaking in front of people, especially in English, is a big stress for me,” and another admitted, “The hardest part was dealing with the anxiety of saying something wrong during the presentation”. These reflections dovetail with the moderate anxiety score (Q3 mean = 3.30) and point to a need for targeted scaffolding in both presentation structure and affective support.

Peer Interaction Benefits

Finally, learners valued the interactive components of peer feedback and rehearsal. Several suggested that “practicing more with a peer or mentor, and receiving feedback beforehand, could have helped me prepare better,” indicating that collaborative rehearsal enhances both content and confidence. Others recommended, “I think presenting it once or twice in front of friends before my peers,” as a low-stakes way to refine delivery and field questions. These qualitative endorsements, alongside the favorable quantitative rating for post-presentation Q&A comfort (Q4 mean = 3.38), underscore the pedagogical value of embedding peer-review stages within ESP presentation tasks.

Together, these quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that integrating student presentations into ESP courses can effectively bolster

vocabulary mastery and fluency, while targeted support in presentation structure and pronunciation may help address remaining challenges.

Discussion

The mixed-methods analysis generated **four main themes** with a total of **eight sub-themes,** as detailed in Table 1 below. Integrating these thematic insights with quantitative findings strengthens the interpretive depth of how presentations influence medical ESP learning.

Theme	Sub-themes
1. Vocabulary Acquisition	• Deep Engagement
	• Lexical Noticing & Retention
2. Fluency & Confidence Gains	• Proceduralization of Speaking Skills
	• Q&A Comfort
3. Anxiety & Structural Challenges	• Performance Anxiety
	• Organizational Difficulties
4. Peer Interaction Benefits	• Collaborative Rehearsal
	• Formative Feedback

Table 1. Themes and Sub-themes from Qualitative Analysis

The present study combined quantitative and qualitative data to explore how student presentations influence ESP learning, with particular attention to vocabulary mastery, accuracy, fluency, confidence, and anxiety. Quantitative results showed the strongest student agreement that presentations enhanced vocabulary acquisition (Q5, M = 3.81, SD = 1.01) and accuracy (Q2, M = 3.80, SD = 1.00). Qualitative comments reinforced these findings: learners emphasized that researching their topics required active engagement with technical terminology, leading to deeper retention and confidence in using specialized lexicon (e.g., “Especially for me, more speaking practice and learning vocabulary would have helped me prepare better”). These observations align with theories of lexical noticing (Alzahrani & Chaudhary, 2022) and support prior research demonstrating the effectiveness of presentations for domain-specific vocabulary growth (Ai et al., 2020).

Students also reported meaningful gains in fluency and self-assurance. The mean fluency score (Q1) was 3.70 (SD = 1.07), and comfort with post-presentation questions (Q4) averaged 3.38 (SD = 1.20). Qualitative narratives highlighted that repeated rehearsal and exposure before peers facilitated more natural, fluid speech (“…deliver the presentation with confidence”). This effect can be understood through the lens of skill acquisition and proceduralization,

whereby practice transforms conscious language processes into automatic skills (DeKeyser & Suzuki, 2025), thereby enhancing learners' willingness to communicate (Khajavy et al., 2018).

Despite these positive outcomes, anxiety remained moderate (Q3, M = 3.30, SD = 1.25). Nearly half of participants acknowledged feeling anxious when presenting, often fearing errors and negative evaluation ("…stress of saying something wrong"). Such experiences reflect foreign language classroom anxiety as it manifests in ESP contexts (Pizarro, 2018).

Although qualitative reflections sometimes highlighted structural challenges—students describing difficulty in organizing content clearly under time pressure—quantitative responses indicated low overall structural difficulty (Q8, M = 1.95, SD = 0.84), suggesting that organizational hurdles may be more pronounced among particular proficiency groups.

Despite the low average score on the structural-difficulty item (Q8 mean = 1.95, SD = 0.84) suggests that most students did not perceive major problems with organizing their presentations, several open-ended responses painted a more nuanced picture. A subset of learners explicitly described struggles "structuring the content in a clear and logical way while also making sure to include all the necessary details," indicating that, for these individuals, organization remained a salient hurdle. This divergence likely reflects a floor effect in the Likert data—many students clustered at the "disagree" end—masking the concerns of a minority whose organizational anxiety was acute. It may also signal proficiency-related differences: lower-level bands (A2–B1) might have experienced greater structural difficulty than their more advanced peers, but these subgroup effects were not visible in the overall mean. Future analyses (e.g., non-parametric comparisons by proficiency) could clarify whether these structural difficulties are concentrated in particular levels. In the meantime, instructors should be attentive to this minority experience by offering targeted signposting workshops and slide-planning templates to ensure that every learner - not just the average - is able to structure technical content with confidence.

Pronunciation of specialized terms presented a moderate challenge (Q9, M = 2.39, SD = 1.08), with under 20% of respondents reporting significant difficulties. This finding implies that while pronunciation support remains valuable, classroom exposure to ESP phonology may have mitigated broader pronunciation issues.

A salient qualitative theme was the pedagogical value of peer interaction. Many students recommended structured rehearsal with classmates or mentors and low-stakes practice sessions prior to formal delivery ("practicing more with a peer or mentor"). Such peer-review opportunities not only reduced anxiety but also provided formative feedback on content, language accuracy, and delivery style, illustrating the benefits of social scaffolding in line with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist framework.

Pedagogical Implications

- Incorporate dedicated workshops on presentation structure early in the curriculum, focusing on signposting language, logical connectors, and slide organization frameworks to bolster organizational competence.
- Embed regular peer-review sessions, allowing students to rehearse in small groups and receive targeted feedback, thereby reducing performance anxiety and fostering collaborative learning.
- Offer focused pronunciation drills for high-frequency ESP terms, using phonemic transcriptions and model recordings to increase learner confidence and intelligibility.
- Design multiple, incremental presentation assignments (e.g., pair presentations, mini-talks) to support proceduralization of speaking skills, gradually reducing cognitive load and enhancing fluency through repetition.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study's sample was drawn from a single institution and spanned proficiency levels from B1 to C1, which may limit generalizability. Reliance on self-report measures introduces potential social desirability bias. Future research should incorporate objective measures of fluency (such as speech rate or pause frequency) and accuracy (error analysis) to triangulate self-perceptions. Longitudinal designs examining the durability of vocabulary and confidence gains would further elucidate long-term effects. Comparative experimental studies that contrast presentation tasks with alternative speaking activities (e.g., debates, simulations) could isolate the unique pedagogical affordances of presentations in ESP contexts.

Conclusion

Mastering ESP - especially specialized medical terminology - presents inherent challenges for learners. By requiring students to deliver presentations before their peers, instructors create a context in which practice becomes inevitable: whether students embrace the opportunity or simply prepare out of necessity, they engage repeatedly with complex vocabulary and structures. This enforced rehearsal fosters deeper lexical acquisition and greater accuracy, while also promoting fluency as learners internalize technical terms through use. Although some anxiety may persist, the act of presenting compels students to confront and overcome their fears, ultimately enhancing confidence during both delivery and interactive Q&A. Embedding structured support - such as targeted workshops on terminology, peer-review rehearsals, and focused pronunciation exercises - can further amplify these gains. In sum, presentations transform a demanding aspect of ESP into a powerful motivator for sustained, meaningful practice, equipping learners with the specialized language competence essential for success in medical contexts.

Acknowledgements

Ethical compliance

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki. All data were fully anonymised, and no personally identifiable information was collected or processed. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their inclusion in the study.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Responsible use of AI

The author acknowledges the use of AI-assisted tools for linguistic refinement and paraphrasing during the preparation of the manuscript – ChatGPT 4 and QuillBot. All outputs were critically reviewed and edited, and the author assumes full responsibility for the content and integrity of the final manuscript.

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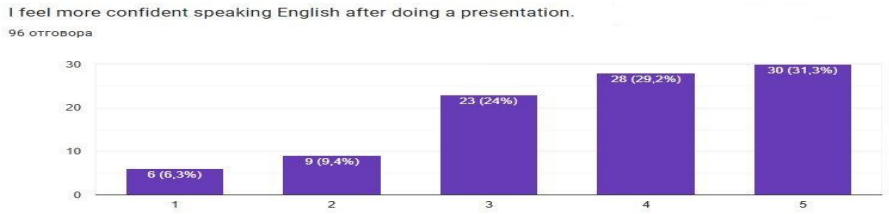
APPENDIX

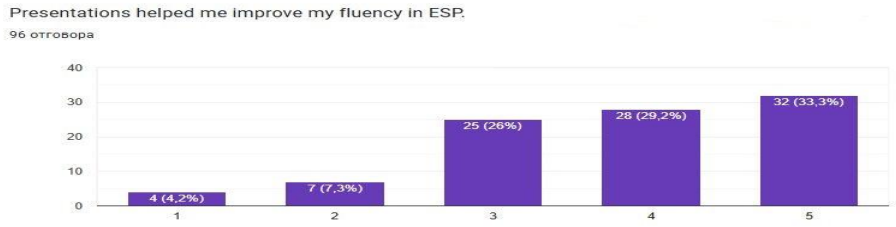
Section 1.

Likert scale questions

Question 1



Question 2



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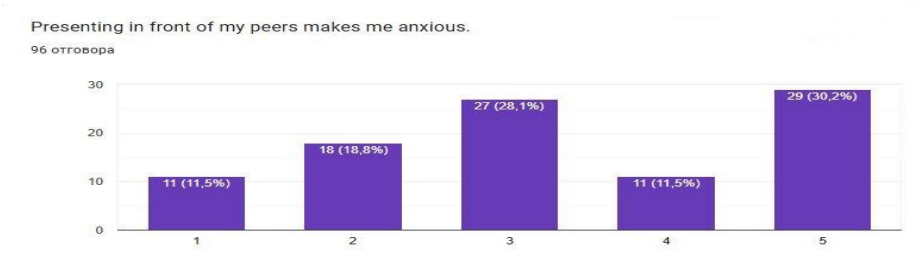

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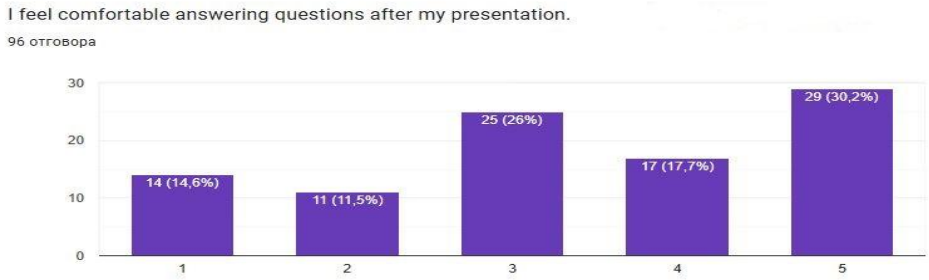
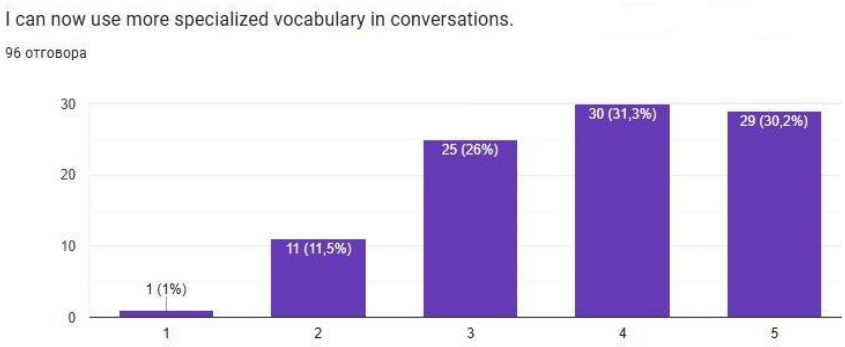


Question 5

Question 6



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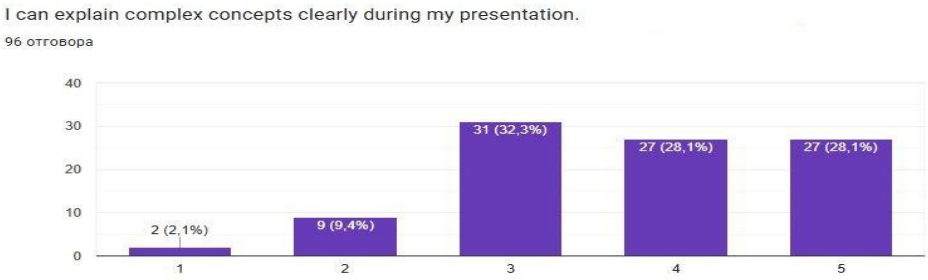

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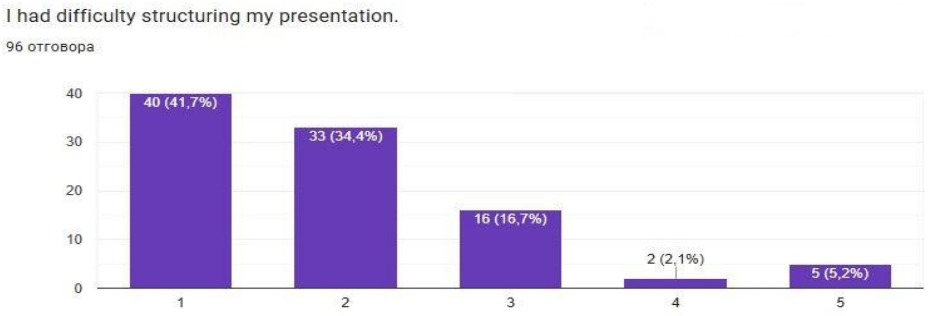
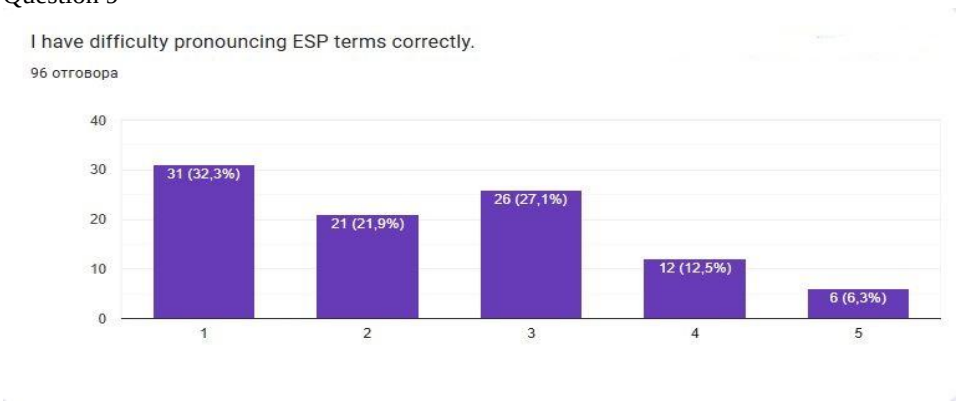


Question 9



Section 2.
Open answer questions

Question 1 – What was the most challenging part of preparing for your presentation?

"To choose the topic probably.", "Finding proper information", "The most challenging part of preparing for my presentation was structuring the content in a clear and logical way while also making sure to include all the necessary details.", "There was no such part", "Gathering the photos", "Structuring the information so that I can fit in the 10 minutes.", "It wasn't challenging, it was interesting because I could chose a topic I'm interested in", "The most challenging part of preparing the presentation was explaining complex processes in a way that colleagues could understand.", "Finding accurate information since different pages present slightly different information.", "Finding good template for my topic.", "The worries about presentation", "Learning the medical vocabulary", "Finding some information and images", "Making it interesting for the audience"; *and more.*

Question 2 – In your opinion, what could have helped you prepare better for a presentation in English?

"I don't know", "Nothing, there was enough time to prepare everything. We chose our own topics, so everyone should be happy.", "I do not know", "In my opinion, practicing more with a peer or mentor, and receiving feedback beforehand, could have helped me prepare better for the presentation in English.", "Nothing else other than what I did", "Maybe just having more information", "Presentation in English", "Nothing, it was good enough in my opinion", "I can't say what would help me in my presentation.", "Maybe more dialogues in English between students during our class.", "Nothing.", "Talking in front of people", "Prepare better", "What helped me was that we were shown example presentations. This way, I understood better what is expected from me. ", "In my opinion, having a subject focused on immunology and a detailed explanation of how vaccines work in the second year, during the fourth semester, would have helped.", "Maybe if there was a way to discuss the pronunciation of some of the words with the teacher first", *and more.*

Question 3 – Do you think presentations should remain a key part of the English course? Why or why not?

“Yes, it's something that can help us improve our public speaking skills and English knowledge as well.”, “Yes, because it is a way to practice the speaking part of the language in front of an audience.”, “I believe presentations should remain a key part of the English course because they significantly improve speaking and communication skills. Through them, we can build confidence, learn new vocabulary, and practice expressing our thoughts clearly and logically. Presentations also help us adapt to different audiences and respond to questions, which is important for our professional preparation.”, “Yes, do!”, “It is a nice way of changing, while still using vocabulary.”, “Yes, presenting in front of people increases your confidence which is very important while speaking a foreign language.”, “Yes, because we can practice speaking in front of people more freely and eventually with more confidence.”, “I think they should be part of our training because this would help us present different topics in the future to a large and foreign audience.”, “Not necessarily because in my opinion they create unwanted pressure on students during a tough semester.”, “Yes, I think the presentation is enough to see how fluent you are in English, so there isn't vocabulary exam.”, “Yes, because they help us remove the worries for talking in front of many people.”, “Yes, presenting helped me to be more confident”, “I learn new things”, “I think giving presentations is very important. You go out of your comfort zone, it is difficult, but it’s something new.”, “Yes, I think presentations should remain a key part of the English course because they help us improve our speaking skills and become more confident when expressing ourselves. They also teach us how to organize our thoughts clearly and communicate effectively, which is very important not only in English but in any professional setting.”, “Yes, because in my opinion it is a different way to learn something new and at the same time make it interesting for others to learn”, and more.