

## PROJECT PITCHING SKILLS FOR IT STUDENTS

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**Abstract.** *Effective business communication is highly valued on the labor market for IT professionals. Project pitching skills are a tiny subset thereof and are taught to first-year students at the Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics of the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. This is an effort within the English for Specific Purposes course where a design thinking approach is applied culminating in a hackathon held in a simulated environment at the end of the Summer semester. Many students believe their skillsets gained from high school experience will suffice, but will they survive a reality check? This paper reports the use of the 23-item SOPQ questionnaire to perform a needs assessment among 259 subjects at the beginning of the academic year. The identified deficits are meant to be reflected in the training provided to a subgroup of these subjects prior to the first stage, solo interactive presentations, which are developed and delivered during the Winter semester. The most common pitfalls in students performance are examined. The SOPQ findings are also compared against the results from the teacher and peer evaluations during the previous year's second stage of the course, project pitching in teams.*

**Key words:** Design thinking, Hackathon, Project-based learning, Artificial intelligence, Generative AI, chatGPT, Business communication, Entrepreneurship, Interactive presentations, Needs assessment.

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