

INTEGRATING STUDENT PRESENTATIONS IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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Abstract

The most important goal that communicative language teaching aims to reach is the ability to communicate. EFL teachers try to make their classes more communicatively dynamic by encouraging students to take initiative, think beyond the textbook, and use language creatively and interactively. This paper aims at presenting some aspects related to the benefits of using oral presentations in the English classroom and a guideline that will help develop students' receptiveness to them. It is important that the teacher should understand the skills involved in giving presentations, and the possible difficulties oral presentations can present for second language learners. Oral presentations, if properly guided and organized, provide a learning experience and teach lifelong skills that will be beneficial to learners in all school subjects, as well as later in their careers. Among the many advantages of making oral presentations for students are: bridging the gap between language study and language use; using the four language skills in a naturally integrated way; helping students to collect, inquire, organize and construct information; enhancing team work; helping students become active and autonomous learners.

Keywords: *oral presentations, multi-skills, critical thinking, improving learning.*

Speaking is one of the least practiced and most neglected skills in almost any EFL classroom, particularly in the case of teacher-centered and large classes, where more emphasis is often placed on the receptive skills. Therefore, oral presentations are an efficient way to encourage students to practice meaningful oral English. Moreover, they foster student involvement and give students the opportunity to practice skills they need in real life situations.

Today's global, competitive and rapidly changing world needs young people who are flexible, active, innovative and creative in problem solving and decision making, who can communicate effectively and work collaboratively. It needs young people to develop their potential as individuals and to be prepared for the demands of the 21st century. "Today's challenging economic

situation means that it is no longer sufficient for a new graduate to have knowledge of an academic subject; increasingly, it is necessary for students to gain those skills which will enhance their prospects of employment" (Fallows & Steven, 2000). Student presentations may be organized individually, in pairs, or in groups. Working individually provides learners with autonomy and privacy, training them to work independently, while working in groups encourages teamwork. Presentations may be based on class lessons or they may be outside projects, and can be used to review information and relate it to previous work.

There are several benefits to using student presentations in the English classroom as they prove "to get student's attention, encourage curiosity, create challenges" (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). According to Girard & Trapp (2011), the potential benefits of students' oral presentations include: greater class interaction and participation, increased interest in learning, new perspectives not covered otherwise, improvement in communication and presentation skills. Among the many advantages of designing oral presentations for students mention should be made of (King, 2002): bridging the gap between language study and language use; using the four language skills in a naturally integrated way; helping students to collect, inquire, organize and construct information; enhancing team work; helping students become active and autonomous learners. In this paper, we have emphasized three aspects we view as most significant.

Student presentations give them the possibility to practice all four language skills

Speaking is the major skill practiced when making an oral presentation because, in order to have a clear, coherent speech, spoken language

is essential. While looking for the information needed to prepare a presentation, students also use and develop reading and writing skills. They must skim and scan a wide range of sources using library and online search tools and thoroughly read materials and articles to gain knowledge on their topic. What is more, students take notes and write argumentative essays, so they will practice writing skills. When listening to other presentations, students improve their listening skills more than listening to a tape because, as audience members, they are supposed to ask questions and interact with the students delivering the speech, thus proving their understanding of what is being presented.

Student presentations help students develop critical thinking skills

In addition to specific language skills and strategies, student presentations foster a variety of critical thinking skills. While researching for a presentation, students study beliefs and theories, analyze arguments, assess the reliability or bias of a source, and distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information. Students are encouraged to compare and contrast, make assumptions, study implications and consequences, and approach materials with a critical eye. As students gather information, they must incorporate their findings into cohesive arguments with logical support. In addition, this information will need to be integrated into their existing knowledge base so they can understand what they find and develop clear presentations.

Student presentations promote learning

Presentations are an ideal way for students to share their knowledge. They are encouraged to include information from a wide range of sources and to assume a teaching role by explaining their topic to the rest of the class. Furthermore, planning for presentations and possible questions from peers leads to deeper processing and a more complete understanding of the content.

Presentations call for students' research, demonstration and review of the language and content. During *the research phase*, students are asked to look for information to sustain their

opinion. While preparing for presentations, students also gain conceptual knowledge rather than simply memorizing facts. Conceptual knowledge refers to an integrated network of knowledge, helping them understand how pieces of information relate to one another. Students need to synthesize information from a variety of sources and integrate it into their existing background knowledge.

The demonstration phase allows students to share their knowledge and hard work. There is a natural focus on language, because students want their arguments to be understood. Immediately following the presentation is a good time to open the floor to class discussion. Students may answer questions about their own presentation and also respond meaningfully to others.

The final phase of presentation is *the review and reflect phase*. This is an important and sometimes omitted stage. One way students can reflect and focus on their language use is by recording their presentations and using these recordings for self-assessment. Following presentations it is useful to ask students to reflect on what they have learned and how their opinions and knowledge may have changed as a result of the information presented.

Assessment

The first evaluation of speakers' performance is still part of the presentation itself, constituting the question-and-answer session that should follow every speech. This throws light on how much speakers have interested the audience and on how successful they have been in getting the message across clearly. Depending on the learning goals assumed, presentations can be assessed in several ways. Some teachers find it useful to include both peer and self-assessment, using a rubric which includes aspects such as the quality, appropriateness and effectiveness of audiovisual aids, body language, eye contact with the audience, natural delivery of the topic, structure of the topic, fluency and accuracy, etc. Others may choose to assess the oral presentation less formally and instead concentrate on the written work produced during preparation activities. Whichever the type of assessment

preferred, the preparation, practice and focus on language will undoubtedly enhance student learning.

For students giving oral presentations, peer response provides assistance in the following areas:

- Each student has a better idea of how effectively they reached their audience.
- Students learn from each other's presentation skills.
- Students are encouraged to be active listeners for the full class.

Designing an outline is undoubtedly the key stage in the development of oral presentation. Students are not normally familiar with outlining skills and need a lot of practice to develop them.

There are six steps that can be used as an *outline to develop student presentation* in the classroom.

Step 1: Identify suitable topics. Depending on your learning objectives, the topics may be based on a lesson, unit, or individual project.

Step 2: Research the topic area. Research may take the form of review of media sources and textbooks, library work or internet searches.

Step 3: Organize and outline key points. Students are asked to critically review the information they have gathered, decide what is relevant and synthesize new information into their existing knowledge.

Step 4: Write argumentative essays. In an argumentative essay the author tries to prove a point rather than simply providing information. The written work may be done as an in-class exercise or assigned as homework.

Step 5: Give oral presentations based on the essays. The teacher should describe the format and expectations of the presentations ahead of time - 10-minute presentations; the use of notes is permitted; students should practice vocabulary and be prepared for questions.

Step 6: Review and reflect. The review may take the form of a class discussion or a short reflection paper.

Essentially, what needs to be stressed is that outlines are hierarchical. A central idea is

supported by three or four main points which are in turn supported by sub-points with further detail underpinning them, and so on. This pattern is incorporated into a simple introduction-body-conclusion format. The model provides a flexible framework, as the body can accommodate the various purposes of speakers - whether descriptive, persuasive, analytical or problem-solution. Using this, students have to decide how to organize their content into a number of logically sequenced main sections in the presentation structure.

I. Introduction

A. Introductory Statement

B. Background, purpose and definition of terms

II. Body

A. Main Point

- sub-point 1 - supporting facts
- supporting examples and anecdotes
- sub-point 2 - supporting facts
- other supporting material

B. Main Point
etc.

III. Conclusion

A. Summary and reinforcement of main points

B. Conclusion and recommendations, if appropriate

C. Positive closing statement and rounding off

Delivering oral presentations is a skill that improves with practice and students need plenty of opportunities to perfect it. Teachers, discreet and supportive, play a key role in the background as facilitators, research guides, ultimate referees and sources of encouragement.

Since oral presentations involve multi-skills, a carefully planned and constructed guideline will help develop students' receptiveness to these presentations. The fundamental purpose of scientific discourse is not mere presentation of information and thought, but rather its real communication (Gopen, 1990). Oral presentations are much more than a simple delivery of one's knowledge. The success of an effective and good oral presentation largely depends on judging all

characteristics of the situation and responding to them properly, and the impression one gives as a person. An oral presentation should never be a monologue, but an active dialogue in which verbal communication is not the only constituent.

The content element of the presentation includes aspects that need to be assessed such as knowledge shown, logical appeal, fielding of objections, questions posed, improvisation shown, and conclusion (Caroll, 2005).

CONCLUSIONS

The introduction of oral presentations to EFL classrooms provides a rewarding and stimulating experience for both teachers in developing facilitating skills and students in training themselves to have confident presentations in public.

Presentations are a way to improve language learning. As students take part in dynamic presentations, they develop increased motivation and engagement with the materials. Language skills will improve because students are using language in meaningful ways for specific purposes and are working toward personal goals. Students learn how to access information and gain knowledge. Integrating student presentations in the classroom helps students develop the ability to communicate both within the classroom and in the outside world. Presentations encourage students to have a mature attitude about their role in the classroom, offering them the opportunity to learn an art that will improve their lives outside the classroom. They empower students by allowing them to take charge of their own learning and to communicate their knowledge to others in authentic ways.

Appendix A

Student Evaluation Form

Topic _____

What did you like best about this presentation?

Which are other ways to improve this presentation?

Did you learn anything new? What skills or advice could you use in the future?

Appendix B

Teacher Evaluation Form

Group: _____ Number: _____ Date: _____ Topic _____

- Preparation
 - ___came to the class early to set up equipment
 - ___made sure all equipment in working condition
 - ___turned in assignment sheet
- Organization
 - ___clear introduction
 - ___logical development
 - ___strong conclusion
 - ___typed and clear outline
- Content
 - ___variety of resources
 - ___amount of research conducted
 - ___originality
- Presentation
 - ___held audiences' attention
 - ___spoke with note cards
 - ___eye contact
 - ___time control
 - ___volume of voice
 - ___effectiveness of visual aids
- Oral skills
 - ___adapt the information for the audience (communicative English)
 - ___clarity & fluency
 - ___provide discussion questions or class activities
 - ___involve the audience
- Overall Group Rating _____
- Teacher comments _____

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