Attitudes of Students of Medicine Toward Oral Presentations as Part of Their ESP (English for Specific Purposes) Course

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Abstract

This article takes a functional approach to examine the attitudes of medical students toward oral presentations in English for specific purposes (ESP) courses by focusing on the performances delivered by the students to catch the precise attitude in respect of the effectivity. The article reflects on the shift of attention from sole teacher-centered classes via helping learners to communicate in the globalized age of knowledge by means of emphasis on oral presentations. This approach considers the students' viewpoints about implementing oral presentations in ESP classes. The attitudes, meanwhile, adhere to learners' problems which hinder them to be active participants and presenters in their classes. However, there are controversies about the appropriateness and constraints of oral presentations by students in an ESP and EFL learning environment. It seems that with meticulous structured planning and organization, oral presentations can lead to valuable for both learners and teachers. While, such activities account for a break away from textbooks, but provide for students such a learning setting that they attend classes with preplanning and excitement. The introduction of oral presentations to ESP classrooms encourages learners in training themselves to have confident presentations in public. This fact is especially true for students of medicine who find themselves in need of taking part at international programs where they need to speak out their research findings and science-based academic developments.

Key words: English for Specific Purposes(ESP); Oral presentation; Students of medicine; Teaching English

INTRODUCTION

Great changes have been taking place across the world as the result of the worldwide web contacts and global accessibility of the Internet which in turn have brought about more demands on the English Language learners' verbal and written mastery as the language of the international contact.

Due to the increasingly urgent need of the university students, specifically students of medicine whose texts are usually in English language, on one hand, and the serious petition for taking active part at the worldwide meetings in order to take advantage of the recent medical advances, mastery over the spoken form and the oral presentation as well as face to face communication with researchers and participants is considered imperative. Owing to this fact, oral presentations have found an authentic place to be considered by ESP teachers and also be involved as part of the classroom activities.

Among the reasons for pursuing this project was to open up a realm within designing communicative competence activities, particularly speaking skill. Despite a great deal of weight given to the acquisition of operational English communication skills, reluctance and failure to communicate in English has been a perceived problem in many ESP classes.

Thus, to obtain an overall account of Iranian Medical students' attitudes toward oral English practice, including their criteria of a good oral presentation, their performance and their concerns and worries about the improvement of this specific skill, a questionnaire was sought to investigate in detail their attitudes. Consequently, the

students were asked to select topics of their interest based on the topics of each taught lesson via collecting their materials out of books and the Internet

1. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

While many universities are delivering courses in ESP, full understanding of the factors contributing to effective creation of ESP courses will help to eliminate non-effective techniques. The drive for this research was grounded in the worldwide revolution from grammar translation method to communicative and task based approaches which have provided facilities for learning of all individuals which consequently have inspired learners to take an active role in their learning process.

The findings will be helpful to teachers who are about to engage students in learning. The research likewise provides a conceptual basis needed for ESP courses which may result in more effective teaching and learning. Instructors of similar courses may find this research useful. Oral presentations may have different effects and various effects on learners' achievements and attitudes as compared to traditional teacher centered classes.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In spite of communicative competence and technology based language learning methods as well as continued emphasis on the development of speaking and listening skills, Iranian students remain reluctant to speak English in class. According to Morita and Kobayashi (2008), there is a growing interest in assessing university students' literacy by focusing on their oral activities. One of these tenets is asking the students to deliver their oral presentations in their English for Specific Purposes classes. According to Morita, oral presentations are considered as highly routinized part of classroom life. Despite the pervasiveness of oral activities in university, relatively little literature has been published thus far about oral presentations in the English language classroom (Morita, 2000; Otoshi & Heffernan, 2008). The previous limited literature usually focused on discussing certain theoretical and practical aspects pertaining to oral presentations in the EFL classrooms. Earlier research on oral presentation has addressed different issues such as the student conceptions (Joughin, 2007), students' preparation process (Kobayashi, 2003), and courses specifically designed to help students develop their presentation skills (Hill & Storey, 2003). Some newer studies also focused on the students' perspectives of the oral presentations. A few recent qualitative studies examined the challenges and socialization processes experienced by ESL students in oral activities for graduate-level content courses (Weissberg, 1993; Morita, 2000; Zappa-Hollman, 2007). Many ESL students perceive these oral activities

positively as an opportunity for them to practice English, learn about the values promoted in English-medium universities, and refine their presentation skills (Zappa-Hollman, 2007). Students aware of the importance of oral presentation skills struggled to improve their skills and they viewed the classroom oral activities as medium for them to practice and seek for advice and comments from the lecturer. The early survey studies and recent qualitative studies showed that oral academic activities are important for socializing ESL students into their academic disciplines.

Throughout this project, a description of Iranian university students' views on effective presentations is yielded and valuable data for the groundwork of this activity is brought together. In the meantime, the current research suggests a set of specific recommendations to improve activities for oral presentations in ES/FL classrooms.

Of the focus of this research is to make learners more cognizant of the importance of presentation skills in English; to get learners more involved in the classroom activities and last but not least to urge learners to think about the criteria that form an effective presentation. The illuminations and findings are assumed to be applicable to a wide scope of ESP and similar contexts.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the objectives the following research questions were structured:

a) Is there any significant difference in the attitudes of students of medical field toward oral presentations in their Esp classes?

b) Is there any significant difference in the attitudes of students of medical field toward oral presentations in their Esp classes in terms of their gender?

c) Is there any significant difference in the attitudes of students of medical field toward oral presentations in their Esp classes in terms of their field of study?

d) Is there any significant difference in the attitudes of students of medical field toward oral presentations in their Esp classes in terms of their age?

4. A BRIEF OUTLOOK ON PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Simon's work (2014) entitled English oral communication skills for the 1st year students of Bachelor's degree program state that one of the major obstacles a student has to overcome during oral communication skills classes is his/ her reluctance to speak. He finds several internal and external reasons hindering the students from taking part in oral presentations.

The external reasons related to the number of students in class and class arrangements while the internal reasons

related to the instructor, appropriateness of teaching materials, lack of motivation and autonomy.

Otoshi and Hefferman (2008) consider factors predicting effective oral presentations in EFL classrooms and carry out a study in which they explore the factors EFL learners consider significant when making presentations. Throughout their study 304 undergraduate students took part who were studying at a private university in Japan. A 30-item questionnaire was used to discover what factors were considered important to learners in doing important and effective presentations. Clarity of speech, voice quality, correctness of language and interaction with the audience were the most presumed items in oral presentations.

Masdayasna (2012) carried out a longitudinal study and suggested a scale for assessing EFL learners' oral presentations. The scale had three major evaluation components: "Preparation", "Organization", and "Presentation". The students were informed about the rating scale against which their performances would be evaluated. Throughout the course each student had five performances on different occasions. The results of her study indicated that: (a) significant improvement was observed in the learners' performances, (b) ANOVA results indicated that the five performances were significantly different, (c) there were high correlations between each paired performance, and (d) the rating scale was a reliable and consistent measure by means of which the instructor could assess the student's speaking ability.

Ali Said et al. (2012) in their article "Taking the Floor: Oral Presentations in EFL Classrooms" discuuss theoretical and practical aspects pertaining to oral presentations in the EFL context. They illuminate issues and propose ideas concerning the advantages of presentations, types of presentations, ways of arranging presentations in the classroom, possible topics of presentations and sources of data and information obtained for the different topics, and ways of assessing presentations in the EFL classroom. Their discussion pave the way for non-EFL contexts, including ESL, content-based language learning, and learning languages other than English.

5. SUBJECTS

The subjects in this study were 100 students studying at Zanjan University of Medical Sciences in different fields of medical sciences including radiology, medicine, and pharmacy who were taking ESP course of 3 units 110 minutes each session held twice a week. The sampling method consisted of all available students of medicine, pharmacy and radiology who took the course. The subjects had studied English as a school subject in their high school for about six years, but they did not have much oral presentation experience before they admitted to the university. The number of students s varied in each class but their age range was 18-21. They had already

passed their pre-university English course. The students differed only in terms of their study field but their subject matter and their title of the course were the same. All students had to deliver an oral presentation in class, which was a requisite in their English course as indicated by the teacher. The teacher asked them to listen to their peers' presentations, and at the end of the project to the instrument which was a questionnaire whose items are discussed in the following section was filled out by the subjects.

6. INSTRUMENT

The means of evaluation provide constructive feedback both for teachers and students on the efficacy of the method. To this end, a questionnaire based on students' presentations consisting of a five -point Likert scale of 19 items was distributed to the medical students after the completion of the project. Consistencies and reliability of the questionnaire were judged according to the Cronbach's Alpha.

Each student was required to make at least one oral presentation during the semester. Details about the format of the oral presentations are as follows:

- The oral presentation given by each student was limited to 15 minutes.
- The oral presentations were graded by the teacher in each session and this grading has a 20% impact on the final scores.
- The presentation scores ranged from 10-20 points.
- As said, About 20% of the students' final grade of the semester depended on their performance in the oral presentations. However, the teacher's grading accounted for a number of equally good or equally bad presentations.

All students were asked to fill out a questionnaire which had not been announced in advance. The questionnaire was anonymous and therefore the students understood their answers and comments would not affect their final grades for this course. The questionnaire was intended to evaluate the level of students' participation, attitude, "perceived fairness" of the process, and the learning outcome of the oral presentations.

7. DATA COLLECTION: METHODS AND PROCEDURE

In order to devise the most appropriate place to encourage students to be more interactive the research was conducted in the following way:

a) Students were registered according to the date and turn of their presentations.
b) They were introduced to their responsibilities in preparation of their assignments and were encouraged to be interactive.

c) The students were allotted a period of two weeks to designate their subject of interest for their presentation.

d) The students were asked to deliver the text of their presentation at least one week prior to their presentation time.

e) The students' attitudes toward the oral presentations were surveyed.

8. RESULTS

As pointed out before, 100 students (42 males and 58 females) took part in this study with mean age of 19.

8.1 Analysis of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised the following items which underwent the related statistical procedures in following order:

Table 1
Students Attitudes Towards Oral Presentation in ESP Classes, Descriptive Data: Percentage of Agreement, Disagreement and With No Idea

No	Items	Disagree	No idea	Agree
1	It took me a lot of time to prepare my oral presentation for the ESP class.	29	68	3
2	I listened carefully to the oral presentations of my classmates.	14	60	78
3	I cared about the comments given by the professor following the oral presentation	20	4	76
4	I considered the responses from other students when preparing oral presentations.	26	9	76
5	I was interested in other oral presentations, and I listened to them carefully.	16	6	78
6	The other classmates were interested in my oral presentation.	31	1	57
7	I learned to do better design from listening to the oral presentations of other students	22	12	56
8	I can improve my oral presentation skills from listening to other presentations.	23	8	69
9	I cared about the comments given by the professor following oral presentations in my ESP class.	10	3	87
10	The oral presentations helped me enhance my ability to express and communicate	22	5	73
11	I would rather make oral presentations than take exams.	30	12	58
12	The oral presentations helped me to improve my speaking skills.	19	5	76
13	The oral presentations helped me improve my ability to cooperate with other people.	23	6	71
14	The oral presentations helped me to speak in English with more self-confidence.	13	5	82
15	The oral presentation helps me to assess my oral communication skills in ESP.	27	5	68
16	The oral presentations increases teacher –student interaction.	34	10	46
17	Listening to oral presentations improve listening skills.	34	7	61
18	Students' oral presentations set the class free of a traditionally teacher-oriented and monotonous environment.	16	5	84
19	The oral presentations make the English language class more motivating.	19	1	79

The frequency data was calculated on the basis of strongly agree to strongly disagree and no idea. In order to cut the data short, the items indicating agree and strongly agree along with strongly disagree and disagree were all put into the same category, but the items unindicated did not have any matching item to be combined. It is worth mentioning that in table D and SD stand for disagree and strongly disagree. By A and SA in the table of items it meant agree along with strongly agree.

Table 2
Descriptive Analysis for Students Who Participated in the Experiment

	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error	95% confidence interval for mean	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
Medicine	47	3.3539	.77280	.11272	3.1270	3.5808
Pharmacy	42	3.7707	.66896	.10322	3.5622	3.9791
Radiology	11	3.6077	.65668	.19800	3.1665	4.0488
Total	100	3.5568	.73867	.07387	3.4103	3.7034

8.2 Homogeneous Subsets

Table 3
Tukey HSD[a,b]**: Homogenoues Subsets Based on Field Study**

Field of study	N	Subset for Alpha = 0.05
		1
Medicine	47	3.3539
Radiology	11	3.6077
Pharmacy	42	3.7707
Sig.		.137

In the above table, means for groups in homogenous subsets are displayed. Harmonic mean sample size equals 22.06. The table furthermore indicated that the group sizes were unequal.

In this section, data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed to answer the questions raised in the previous section. Asked about the amount of time it took the students to get ready for their presentation, majority of them believed that it did not take much time from them. It is rather amazing that 68 did not have any idea. Among

the students, 78% listened to their classmates carefully. A reason might be that most students did not favor a teacher – the sole speaker classes. While 70% claimed that they cared about comments given by the professor, 20% did not perceive that.

On the other hand, 76% of the students said that they considered the responses from other students when preparing their oral presentations. Yet, 26% disagreed with this item (No.4). These returns indicate that the respondents took an active part in oral English practice.

As for item 6 (the other classmates were interested in my oral presentation), 57 believed that their lecture was interesting for their classmates, while 31 did not believe in this item and this result is enthusiastic enough calling for further study. The reason may be that they are not confident of their oral English level. 56% of the students believed they learned to better design from listening to the oral presentations of their peers. This factor is considered important for the preparation stages of presentations, and can be dealt with by teachers in class by clearly explaining the implications of these criteria to their learners, so they can factor this into their evaluations. Item No 9 (I cared about the comments given by the professor following oral presentations in my ESP class) reflected much attention from the part of the students among the 19 items, while 87% agreed with this item, only 10 disagreed with it.

Similarly item 10 reflects positive attitudes of the students toward this item in which majority of the students (73%) claimed that oral presentations helped them to enhance their ability to express and communicate. Quite interestingly 58% hold the idea that they preferred oral presentation evaluation take the place of written exams, this item may be an indication that the students who answered positively had a high self-confidence and dared to speak in front of the whole class which again asserts that they are extroverted enough to communicate orally in ESP class. Item No 12 is another assertion that oral presentations and lectures were useful enough to create in learners the feeling of improvement in speaking skill; 76% positively regarded this item (The oral presentations helped me to improve my speaking skills.

Items 13, whereby 71% of the students believed that these peer oral presentations helped them to cooperate with people is of high importance in an Iranian setting where they lack contact with a variety of target language speakers. The opportunities to contact and cooperate with foreigners let them to have access to frequent contact with assimilated English language setting. Oral presentations create a situation that the students have a face-to-face communication with their peers which usually occurs when they talk to their peers. Item No 14 attracts much of the attention and the students think highly of oral presentation due to that they increase their self-confidence. This result may indicate that they can overcome the fear of speaking in front of the class.

In item No 15.68% of the students attach great importance signifying that "The oral presentation helps them to assess their oral communication skills in ESP". In contrast 27% reported their negative attitude toward this item.

A clear point of thought in a foreign language classroom is the notion of interaction. The results point out that about half of the respondents (46%) believed that oral presentations increased teacher-student interaction (item 16). This is an area of investigation and speculation as the expectation was more than this. Since the objective of oral presentation is to increase interaction and to set an assumed class free of sole teacher oriented environment. 84% agreed with the item that the class with oral presentations of the students was not traditionally teacher-oriented and monotonous classroom (item 18). This belief may be due to that there was a good interaction among the students.

Concerning item No 19 (The oral presentations make the English language class more motivating) 79% signifying more than half of the asses agreed with this item. They ranked this way of classroom activity positively perhaps because they had freedom to create and input their own ideas in their own choice of material.

DISCUSSION

The objective of the study was to explore the efficiency of oral presentations among Iranian university students in terms of their attitude. Students need to be able to present their learning in order to gain ownership of the learning process. Most often students either lack oral presentation skills or fail to be able to organize their presentation effectively, in all they miss out on verbal and nonverbal skills. In order to train our students and make them more confident and good presenters of knowledge, the researcher decided to employ its effect on our students' attitudes to ESP classes.

In order to answer the research questions, an attitude survey was conducted. Descriptive statistics and statistical analysis using SPSS19 were employed to interpret the results. The questionnaire was developed based on the literature review and consisted of 19 items across the following evaluation criteria of oral presentations: (see the evaluation rubrics in Appendix 1). The criteria and the description of the rubrics were modified for this study by identifying common rubrics from related studies (e.g., Cheng & Warren, 2005). In order to spread out the responses from the participants (Likert, 1932), item statements were categorized into phrased statements. Each item was measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale (for positive statements, from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree; and for negative statements the coding was reversed).

The following were the mainstream findings:
- 78 % listened to their classmates carefully.
- 70% claimed that they cared about comments given by the professor.
- 76% of the students said that they considered the responses from other students when preparing their oral presentations.
- 78% stated that they were interested in the oral presentations delivered by their classmates.
- Majority of the students (73%) claimed that oral presentations helped them to enhance their ability to express and communicate.
- 71% of the students believed that these peer oral presentations helped them to cooperate with people is of high importance in an Iranian setting.
- 84% agreed with the item that the class with oral presentations of the students was not traditionally teacher-oriented and monotonous classroom.
- 79% stated that the oral presentations make the English language class more motivating.

From the results of the present study, three components were identified to influence university students' views on effective oral presentations: Self-confidence, speaking skills and Interaction with the audience. Therefore, teachers must explain the component items and how oral presentations can positively increase students' attitude toward ESP classes. This will serve to act as guidance for learners striving to become more effective presenters. The learners can prepare transcripts of their presentations, which can then be checked by their peers. The presenter's peers can then focus on the grammatical accuracy and vocabulary use. This will ensure that a complete understanding and thus interaction is obtained by both presenters and their peers.

An overall reflection of the research process, procedures and its implications revealed that students did make good progress with the use of criteria and rubrics on their presentations skills. The students sometimes came to the teacher and stated that they feared making mistakes in class and losing face in front of their peers. There was a general feeling of anxiety when in whole-class activities. Thus, efforts can be made by the teachers to overcome the students' anxiety. Also grouping the students into small groups may be a good way to decrease the severity of this problem.In small groups, the self-selected members in the groups will give the students freedom of activities and more involvement (Karimkhanlooei, 2012).

To this end, in a follow-up study, I suggest to provide students with the opportunity to experience an individual project as well as a group project. I would also a wider time frame in which to conduct the presentation projects to examine how students can become more active speakers of English within the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Arranging oral presentations have been very difficult and ineffective in our populated classes each year. Spoken English has gained unprecedented attention from all those concerned in Iran. Educators and researchers have done little to improve the situation. This study explored a scheme of implementing a method of classroom activity to improve students' participation and learning outcome using oral presentation. Basically, students were asked to state their overall attitudes toward peer presentations. In the questionnaire, students significantly showed stronger agreement that making oral presentations helped them improve their ability to express, communicate, and cooperate with other people. Though the motivation of this research was for our medical students design course, it is felt that the experience and findings in this research can be also useful for other teachers who design courses accompanied by oral presentations.

The data gained from the study indicate that many Iranian university students are in favor of the use of oral presentation in classroom environment. On the teachers' part, more could be done to lessen students' anxiety and enhance their motivation of delivering more goal-oriented presentations in English. This study suggests that to take up a learner centered approaches as emphasized in nowadays' educational platform, implementation of students presentations should be considered as a backbone to this approach.

Teachers are shouldering more responsibilities than students as to achieve a better output of teaching and learning. Based on the results of this study, we can draw some conclusions about recommendations on how to best prepare our learners for oral presentations. Teachers may apply the following strategies to improve students' spoken English and oral presentations:

Assign a part of class time for oral presentations and help the students set a realistic goal of English learning. A foreign language can be learned only through learners' participation in the classroom. The teacher's tasks are to direct their students toward recitation of their ideas which per se lead to better speakers and oral presenters. According to Davies and Pearse (2000) the teachers should try to create a relaxed atmosphere in their classes and make the classroom a conversational place. The teachers are supposed to be both motivators and mediators of discussions after presentations. According to Brown (1994) small group discussions and oral presentations provide a non-competitive atmosphere, a sense of involvement and a sense of equality. When students are comfortable with their peers, they become more confident and take more risks which mean that they may even be volunteers in delivery of oral presentations. Students can exchange their ideas, experiences, and attitudes with one another over the presentation sessions.

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