

What Oral Presentations Bring Into Efl Class

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Abstract

It is the primary aim of every English teacher to encourage his students to practice their oral English and become more fluent because language is a means of communication, and its primary element is Speaking. Every language learner expects to be able to speak the language first, then acquire the other three skills, which are Listening, Reading and Writing. In this study, the importance of oral presentations in terms of increasing Student Talking Time (STT) is emphasized. On the other hand, the drawbacks and risks of conducting Oral Presentation sessions are also pointed out.

Özet

Dil, bir iletişim aracıdır ve dilin en önemli ögesi de konuşmadır. Bu nedenle, her İngilizce hocasının temel amacı öğrencileri İngilizce konuşmaya teşvik etmek ve dilde daha akıcı hale gelmelerini sağlamaktır. Dil öğrenen herkes, öncelikle konuşma becerisi kazanmayı ve daha sonra diğer üç dil becerisi olan "Dinlediğini Anlama", "Okuduğunu Anlama" ve "Yazma" becerilerini edinmek ister. Bu çalışmada, "Öğrenci Konuşma Süresi"ni artırma konusunda sözlü sunumların önemi vurgulanmakta; öte yandan, bu tür sunumlar yaptırmanın zorlukları ve riskleri ele alınmaktadır.

Keywords: *Oral presentations, presenting student, student talking time, communicative competence, speech fear.*

Introduction

It is the primary aim of any EFL teacher to encourage students to practice their oral English and become more fluent. We, English teachers, constantly look for new ways of making students participate more in classroom activities and talk as much as they can taking into consideration the fact that "practice makes perfect." In addition, we complain about students' inactivity, and feel that our lessons sometimes turn into a one-man show in which the teacher tries to pour knowledge into students' heads. What leads us to this problem is generally the monotony of course book usage. After all, most students yearn for more opportunities to speak English and to become more fluent and more proficient in both everyday English and in their fields of study. Also, oral presentations are ideal for an integration of all four skills in language learning. According to King [1], oral presentation is an effective communicative activity that has been widely adopted by EFL conversation teachers to promote oral proficiency. One of the best ways of increasing Student Talking Time (STT) is oral presentations, which bring a lot of advantages both to the presenting student and the audience; that is, the other students. These advantages could be listed as follows, so an oral presentation:

- gives the Presenting Student (PS) a good opportunity to talk to an audience in the foreign language he is learning.
- increases the PS's self-confidence

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- increases the PS's self-confidence
- is a good listening practice for the audience
- is a good opportunity for the PS to make a research in the field he gives his presentation and to talk to an audience as he might need to give presentations in his professional life in the future.

King is in the opinion that 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. She goes on to say that among the many advantages of making oral presentations for the 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; and helping students become active and autonomous learners.

On the other hand, there are some drawbacks of oral presentations that should be kept in mind. Firstly, students below advanced level might have difficulty giving an unbroken speech due to their weakness in grammar and vocabulary. Secondly, some students will tremble with nervousness no matter how well-prepared they are. Finally, some students may run out of material to talk about, and struggle painfully to fill the allotted time. All these risks might turn sessions into dull and time-wasting periods, so possible risks should be taken into consideration [2] In addition, King mentions some other possible problems. She points out that when oral presentations are assigned in class, the teacher will get either complete silence or grumbles from students who find the idea of oral presentations frustrating and intimidating. After all, oral presentations can be a time-consuming project with no guarantee of a satisfactory performance. So, the teacher should keep in mind all the possible problems, and take measures beforehand.

To get full benefit from presentations it is advisable to do this activity with students at Pre-Intermediate Level and above. Otherwise, the session might turn into a dull and fruitless one.

This paper covers a very functional activity frequently practised in EFL classes. This oral presentation activity brings dynamism and motivation into EFL classes in which students aim to gain fluency in English.

Background

This study aims to emphasize the importance of in-class oral presentations conducted by university English preparatory class students. Today, language students are considered successful if they can communicate effectively in their second or foreign language. Thus, the teaching of the speaking skill has become increasingly important. Educators and researchers agree that "communicative competence" entails not solely grammatical accuracy but also a knowledge of sociocultural rules of appropriateness, discourse norms, and strategies for ensuring that a communication is understood [3] Taking the facts stated above into consideration, language teachers should use activities and exercises focusing on oral competence rather than grammatical accuracy to make students more fluent in English. When choosing oral exercises and activities it is advisable to choose those which foster real communication in and out of the classroom.

In other words, students should be given the opportunity to learn everyday English alongside formal English. Riggan and Lazaraton suggest that the goal of a speaking component in a language class should be to encourage the acquisition of communication skills and to foster real communication in and out of the classroom. In the same context, Hadley [4] states that in recent years much of the discussion relating to proficiency-oriented instruction and testing has focused on the development of oral skills. She goes on to say that many language students consider speaking ability one of their primary goals of study, either because they would derive some personal satisfaction from being able to speak a second language or because they feel it would be useful in pursuing other interests or career goals.

All these facts bring into mind the importance of focusing on oral proficiency activities one of which is oral presentation, the main issue in this paper.

Initial planning of in-class Oral Presentations

a. Choice of subject

When the teacher tells students that he expects them to give presentations, the first question that comes to an average student's mind is "What will I talk about?" Almost every teacher would agree that giving students the chance to choose the subject is the best idea as different people have different interests. So, eliciting interests from each student could help them choose a subject related to their hobbies, professional activities, past holidays, etc. [5] Having elicited interests from students, the teacher can then tell students that they are free to choose any topic. It is generally the case that students are more imaginative than we suppose. (ibid) .

The teacher should inform students about where they can find topics and resources. Some of the resources students can consult are English newspapers, magazines, websites, questionnaires, surveys, interviews, library research, radio programmes, English teaching institutes, travel brochures, and video.

b. Preparation

Preparation is the key element of a presentation, so students should be allocated enough time to get well-prepared. In addition, the teacher should state that he is ready to help students with any difficulties they might encounter during preparations. This will give them more confidence and make them feel more secure. The most common difficulty students have during the preparation stage is how to pronounce some words. Having said so, students should be encouraged to consult their teacher if they run into problems.

The presenting student should

- think about what the background knowledge of the audience is
- brainstorm his topic and write an outline
- research the topic at the depth he will give his presentation
- write a draft and plan his talking time
- plan and prepare visual aids if he is going to use any
- rehearse the presentation several times until he feels fully prepared.

c. Guidelines

Students should be guided by the teacher so that they can learn “do’s and don’t’s” of presentations. Writing out guidelines and giving each student a copy of them can be helpful. Below is such a list which could be used to guide students:

1. Before speaking , PS should

- prepare handouts for classmates with the following on:
 - give a list of new words
 - write a few questions to ask his friends at the end of his talk.
- not read, but speak.
- write short notes for himself to look at during his talk.
- write some questions on the handout for the audience to answer after his talk.

2. While speaking, PS should

- stand up, not sit down
- maintain eye contact with listeners
- smile
- speak clearly
- not overrun time (5-10 minutes)

3. The following should be considered to make a talk more interesting and more motivating:

a) While introducing the topic, the ice-breaking introduction might be:

I am going to talk about

The aim of my presentation is

b) Referring to questions:

If you don’t mind, we’ll leave the questions till the end.

Feel free to interrupt me if there is anything you don’t understand.

c) While moving to another point:

The next point is that.....

Now I’d like to explain.....

d) While summarizing:

To sum up.....

OK, to recap the main points.....

e) While drawing the audience’s attention, the following could be asked :

Is that clear?

Did you get my point?

f) While referring to visual aids:

This transparency shows that.....

I would like to draw your attention to....

g) While referring to common knowledge:

As you know.....

I’m sure you are aware that.....

d. Time allocation

It is commonly agreed that an ideal presentation should last about 5-10 minutes, plus questions. Students should learn not to overrun this allocated time and prepare their talks accordingly. However, it is better to be flexible about the time limit than cut a continuing talk.

Equipment in Oral Presentations

It is very helpful to use visual aids such as overheads, flipcharts, slides, etc. as they make it easier for the audience to understand the talk. In addition, students should be encouraged to bring in some purposeful material such as maps, real objects, posters, flashcards, paper clips, Internet documents, paintings, family pictures, tailor-made role-play cards, pre-recorded interviews, etc. Teacher guidance is essential here about how to use an OHP if some students have not had a similar experience before.

Teacher's role in in-class Oral Presentation

Working with students on oral presentations is a time-taking and challenging job for teachers because students need a lot of help and guidance from topic selection to using an OHP. In other words, as King (2002) puts it, the teacher is the guide, organizer, consultant, resource person, and supporter. It is commonly believed by EFL teachers that to teach effectively teachers should create a learner-friendly environment where students feel comfortable and independent. Galloway and Labarca [6] advocate activities that challenge students to solve problems and take responsibility for their own learning. The teacher in their view, needs to fulfill two crucial roles: (1) that of the "architect" who carefully plans the construction, connection, consolidation, and comfort of classroom experiences and (2) that of the "mediator" who guides students to observe, activate prior knowledge, represent information, select strategies, construct meaning, monitor understanding, assess strategy use, organize and extend learning.

Another very important role of an EFL teacher regarding oral presentations is to help students cope with their speech fear and anxiety, which should be considered as normal. It is also important for the teacher to emphasize the difference between Spoken English and Written English, and encourage students not to simply read what they have written but speak as much as they can. In addition, students should be informed that making grammatical or pronunciation mistakes is quite natural, and that they will not be graded by the mistakes they make.

Feedback

If you are actually teaching presentations, you will probably want to give feedback after each presentation, but this should be done with tact. You are best placed to judge the value of such feedback, depending on level and culture. A prepared observation feedback form, divided into different sections might be used. (Chart 1) Then comments can be given verbally and/or in writing. A feedback form is particularly valuable in giving the presenting student something tangible to take away as a mark of achievement. And you should certainly strive to ensure that overall the feedback is positive, while not avoiding important negative points that need to be worked on (Essberger, 1998). The following chart may be used in students' in-class oral presentation:

Student Oral Presentation Observation Feedback Form						
Criteria	Expressing ability (20)	Fluency (20)	Accuracy (20)	Pronunciation (20)	Variety of topic (20)	Total (100)
Students						
Student 1						
Student 2						
Student 3						
Student 4						
Student 5						
Student 6						
Student 7						

Chart 1: Student Oral Presentation Observation Feedback Form

Riggenbach and Lazaraton suggest involving the audience in the evaluation process by employing peer evaluation technique so that they do not simply become passive listeners but take a role in the process. In this technique, the teacher gives the audience the same form he has drawn up for himself and asks them to evaluate the presenting student. To make the process more fruitful he also selects two students beforehand to formally evaluate the presentation and give an oral summary and ask the presenter follow-up questions.

The following rubric developed by Mc Cullen [7] (*Information Technology Evaluation Services, NC Department of Public Instruction*) could be used as a means of evaluation as well:

Presentation Rubric

	Evaluating Student Presentations				Total
	1	2	3	4	
Organization	Audience cannot understand presentation because there is no sequence of information.	Audience has difficulty following presentation because student jumps around.	Student presents information in logical sequence which audience can follow.	Student presents information in logical, interesting sequence which audience can follow.	
Subject Knowledge	Student does not have grasp of information; student cannot answer questions about subject.	Student is uncomfortable with information and is able to answer only rudimentary questions.	Student is at ease with expected answers to all questions, but fails to elaborate.	Student demonstrates full knowledge (more than required) by answering all class questions with explanations and elaboration.	
Graphics	Student uses superfluous graphics or no graphics	Student occasionally uses graphics that rarely support text and presentation.	Student's graphics relate to text and presentation.	Student's graphics explain and reinforce screen text and presentation.	
Mechanics	Student's presentation has four or more spelling errors and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has three misspellings and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has no more than two misspellings and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has no misspellings or grammatical errors.	
Eye Contact	Student reads all of report with no eye contact.	Student occasionally uses eye contact, but still reads most of report.	Student maintains eye contact most of the time but frequently returns to notes.	Student maintains eye contact with audience, seldom returning to notes.	
Elocution	Student mumbles, incorrectly pronounces terms, and speaks too quietly for students in the back of class to hear.	Student's voice is low. Student incorrectly pronounces terms. Audience members have difficulty hearing presentation.	Student's voice is clear. Student pronounces most words correctly. Most audience members can hear presentation.	Student uses a clear voice and correct, precise pronunciation of terms so that all audience members can hear presentation.	
				Total Points:	

Chart 2: Presentation Rubric

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to emphasize that Student Talking Time could be increased by oral presentations, which are both a good speaking opportunity for the presenting student and a listening opportunity for the audience. According to Essberger (2000), although Teacher Talking Time has its place in providing a model for students, it is clear that the principal objective of most students is to be able to use English for communication purposes. Apart from this, it should be remembered that oral presentations are a good means for students to make a research in the fields they are interested. Moreover, in a class of, say, 20 students, the audience have the chance of listening to and learning things in plenty of subjects. Also, it is a break away from textbooks both for teachers and for students.

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