

IMPLEMENTING VIRTUAL PRESENTATIONS PROGRAM IN ESL CLASSROOMS



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5. Report

5.1 Proposed Executive Summary

Academic professionals today face the challenges of constantly having to present their research findings at the local and international conferences as a means of gaining recognition for their career development and securing a better professional leverage. However, one of the obstacles faced by these academic professionals is in delivering an effective presentation in front of a targeted audience. Black-outs, poor eye-contact, inappropriate visual stimulus, poor language delivery are some of the common worst-case scenarios that dampen their otherwise good content delivery. A major concern that leads to this occurrence is attributed to the anxiety that these professionals have to triumph over.

Anxiety is a basic human emotion consisting of fear and uncertainty which if left unattended, would foreshadow an effective oral presentation. This study aims to examine data relating to the anxiety levels of the academic professionals as presenters who have presented their expert ideas at international conferences. Since English is the main language of many international conferences (Nunan, 2003) it is important to study the levels and sources of anxiety among this particular group of presenters. As such, factors and criteria enriching effective oral presentation skills are identified.

This research is carried out via a survey questionnaire and interviews on a selected group of presenters that have presented at the international level. The outcome of this research will benefit academic professionals to overcome oral presentation anxiety apart from giving them some pointers on how to be a better and effective presenter in the future.

5.3 Introduction and Literature Review

Every student's academic and professional success is partially reliant on communicative education as it is an essential competency for students across disciplines in higher education (Rubin & Morreales, 1996 cited in [1]). Having impressive grades is simply not adequate as students with excellent academic records are burgeoning everywhere. Hence, they need to have the extra edge to compete and possessing an effective communicative skill is a must in the current situation. Alain de Botton, a writer was once quoted saying that "I passionately believe that it is not just what you say that counts, it is also how you say it- that the success of your argument critically depends on your manner of presenting it," [2] This highlights the impact of boasting a great communication skill and in addition to that, it also prepares students to be effective employees for the global work environment [1] cited in [2]. The fear of speaking in front of a group weighs as one of the principal reasons why many job seekers are rejected and also why thousands of employees in the US decline job promotions. Krannich [3] explains that the acceptance of a new position often requires promoted individuals to deliver a speech or presentation to their newly assigned supervisors and departmental co-workers, the matter which they dreaded the most.

In accordance to King [4], Asian students particularly perceive oral presentations as face threatening activity, which is not highly surprising as protecting one's face is a culture deeply rooted in most Asiaps. This adds to the reason why they fear oral presentations besides having to struggle with their English proficiency if the presentation is in English. However, this phenomenon is not exclusive to just Asians, in fact it is also ubiquitous among Americans as according to The Book of List, they fear giving public speech the most, even more than death and as many as 75% American college students admit to greatly fearing this activity [5]. The situation can be likened to a worldwide plague as Furmark et al., (1999) found that oral presentation is described as the most prevalent fear that individuals from diverse backgrounds have with 77% of the general population reported the fear for it [2].

Due to the overwhelming fear, majority of second language learners especially experience varying degrees of anxiety when asked to express their views in front of other people [6]. Research has also shown that L2 anxiety can be identified by physiological symptoms, including sweaty palms, nervous stomachs, increased heartbeats, and rapid pulse rates. The anxiety may also reveal itself through psycholinguistic factors such as distortion of sounds, inability to produce the proper intonation and rhythm of the language, 'freezing up' when called on to perform, and failing to remember words or phrases just learned or simply refusing to speak (Haskin et al., 2003). To add to the list, Onwuegbuzie et al., (2000) and Von Worde [7] also state that other physiological symptoms that could be present include dry mouth, muscle contractions and tension, headaches, clammy hands, cold fingers, foot tapping, and desk drumming. As a



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