

COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE USE OF ORAL PRESENTATION AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING TECHNIQUE IN THE CLASSROOM¹

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Abstract: Task-based learning has generally been implemented for university students. One task type common to especially language students is oral presentation. Giving an oral presentation may seem to be a limited activity, but it actually involves all the language skills. The students should read and write in the preparation, speak in the presentation, and listen and speak in response to questions. This paper presents a study of the students' perceptions on the use of oral presentation as a teaching and learning technique in the classroom. The participants of the study were 120 undergraduate English Education students of two different courses. The data were collected mainly from the students' essays, written at the end of semester, on the advantages and disadvantages of using the technique in the classroom. The data were then analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative analysis was first used for assessing the responses obtained from the essays; and secondly, the qualitative analysis provided the evaluation and interpretation of the figures. The results showed that most students appreciated the use of oral presentation in the classroom because the technique would make them become more responsible and active in their own learning; however, some less-motivated students would focus only on the materials in their own presentations and would not pay enough attention to other students' presentations.

Key words: *task, teaching and learning technique, oral presentation*

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Teaching and learning at tertiary level should focus on developing students' autonomy so that the students will be able to take responsibility for their own learning, and on providing the students with the skills in learning how-to-learn. Educational activities should therefore be so designed and organized that they will stimulate and support students into reaching not only cognitive instructional objectives but also behavioral objectives.

There are many kinds of teaching methodology which can be employed to promote learner autonomy: using process syllabus (Widdowson, 1990), employing self-access learning (Jordan, 1997; Lynch, 2001), involving task-based and project-based learning (Robinson, 1991; Robinson *et al.*, 2001), integrating technology in teaching and learning (Todd, 2001; Warschauer, 2002). One common approach for college students is task-based learning. According to Robinson (1991), task-based work is enjoyable and actively engages the students. A good task is motivating and absorbing and it will exploit the learners' prior experience (Littlejohn & Hicks, 1987, p. 72). There is a range of task types which can be used to promote learner autonomy. Tasks may include role plays and simulations, case studies, projects, and oral presentations. Oral presentation is a short talk on a set topic given to a group of people (The Learning Centre, UNSW, 2010).

This paper presents a study of the use of oral presentation as a teaching and learning technique at an education faculty of a state university in Sumatra. The study focuses on the students' perceptions on the use of oral presentation as they experienced by themselves for the whole semester in a 16-week course.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Task-based teaching claims that language learning will result from

creating the right kinds of interactional processes in the classroom, and the best way to create these is to use specially designed instructional tasks (Richards, 2005, p. 33).

Van den Branden (2006) defines "task" in terms of language learning goal and educational activity or a technique used in the classroom. As a language learning goal, a task is an activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective, and which necessitates the use of language (p. 4). A similar definition is provided by Bygate, Skehan & Swain (2001). They view task as an activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective. The definition implies that using language is a means to achieve an objective: by understanding language input and by producing language output, i.e. by interacting with other people through the use of language, the objectives that have been determined can be better achieved. Input refers to the spoken, written and visual data that learners work with in the course of completing a task (Nunan, 2004, p. 47).

As an educational activity or a teaching and learning technique, a task should facilitate meaningful interaction and offer learners opportunity to process meaningful input and produce meaningful output in order to reach relevant and obtainable objectives (Van den Branden, 2006, p. 8). Moreover, Lee (2000) defines a task as a language learning endeavor that requires learners to comprehend, manipulate, and/or produce the target language.

Comprehending, manipulating, and producing language involves information processing at the cognitive level. Cucchiarini and Jaspaert (1995) classify four levels of information processing: (a) the copying level, where learners simply reproduce information without processing it for comprehension, (b) the descriptive level, where learners process

information in the same structure as it is presented, (c) the restructuring level, where learners rearrange and restructure information, and (d) the evaluative level, where learners reflect on the language by comparing information in two different sources.

There are some key characteristics of a task (Richards, 2005): (a) it is something that learners do or carry out using their existing language resources, (b) it has an outcome which is not simply linked to learning language, though language acquisition may occur as the learner carries out the task, (c) it involves a focus on meaning, and (d) in the case of tasks involving two or more learners it calls upon the learners' use of communication strategies and interactional skills.

According to Van Avermaet *et al* (2006), in task-based language teaching, the roles of teacher includes (a) motivating learners to invest intensive mental energy in task completion, and (b) interactionally supporting task performance in such a way as to trigger processes such as the negotiation of meaning and content, the comprehension of input, the production of output and focus on form.

There are many task types that can be used in task-based teaching. Willis (1996) proposes six types of tasks and a sequence of activities for a task which includes pre-task activities, task cycle, and language focus. However, one task type common to college students is oral presentation, which is a talk on a topic to a group of people. In an oral presentation, one or more students present or explain a topic based on their readings to a group of people. The group then joins in a discussion of the topic.

At college, a lecturer may assign students to give an oral presentation on a particular topic so the students can learn about something new and then teach the new topic to their classmates. So everyone learns. Oral presentations

allow students the opportunity to teach one another instead of learning from the lecturer.

Giving an oral presentation may involve (a) reading background material, (b) preparing and delivering a talk, (c) preparing handouts and visual aid, (d) preparing relevant and thought-provoking questions, (e) leading a group discussion, and (f) submitting a written assignment based on the presentation topic.

METHODOLOGY

The participants of this study were 120 sixth-semester undergraduate English Education students of 2 different courses (*English for Specific Purposes* and *Applied Linguistics* courses) in 3 different classes at a state university in Sumatra. The data were collected mainly from the students' essays, written at the end of semester, on the advantages and disadvantages of using oral presentation as a teaching and learning technique in the classroom. The data were then analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative analysis was first used for assessing the responses obtained from the essays; and secondly, the qualitative analysis provided the evaluation and interpretation of the figures

PROCEDURE

Each class was divided into groups of 4 students. Each group presented a topic previously determined in the content-based syllabus. Each member of the group read the textbooks and found the necessary details from other sources or via internet so that he/she could have a solid understanding of the topic. The group also prepared the power-point slides to facilitate their oral presentation in the classroom. In the presentation, every member of the group had a turn to present or speak on his/her sub-topic.

The presentation session would then be followed by the question-answer session, when their classmates would ask questions. The class would have two terms of 3 questions each. Each member of the presenting group had his/her turn to answer the questions. When necessary, the person who asked a question might ask for further details or argue on the issue in question, and the other students might also participate in the discussion. The presentation would usually last 30 minutes, and so would the question-answer session. The remaining 40 minutes would be used by the lecturer to comment on the presentation in terms of the language and content. The lecturer might correct the misunderstanding or misinterpretation of concepts, give or add further details to help the students understand the topic.

The oral presentation may seem to be a limited activity, but it actually involves all the language skills (Souillard & Kerr, 1987) and high levels of information processing at the cognitive level. In the preparation stage, the students should read to understand the material and write what they have understood on power-point slides. In the presentation stage, the students should speak intelligibly and logically so that the class could understand the topic. In the question-answer session, the students should listen and speak in response to questions.

In terms of information processing (Cucchiari & Jaspaert, 1995), the students should go beyond mere comprehension or reproduction (the copying and descriptive levels). They should be able to select information, establish the relationships between bits of information, designing a new structure to available information (the restructuring level), and to compare information of two different sources, and to reflect on the possible use and relevance of the information (the evaluative level).

FINDINGS

The findings of the study are the students' perceptions on the use of oral presentation as a teaching and learning technique in the classroom, which include the advantages and disadvantages of using the technique in the teaching and learning process. Tables 1 and 2 show the advantages and disadvantages respectively.

Table 1
Advantages of Using Oral Presentation

	Advantages	N	%
1	The students become more independent in learning.	101	84.17
2	The students become active in the teaching and learning process.	97	80.83
3	It builds self-confidence as the students learn how to explain the material in front of their classmates.	95	79.17
4	The students can practise/improve their speaking skill.	96	80.00
5	By working in groups, the students can help each other to understand the material.	65	54.17
6	The students can understand the material through discussion in the question-answer session.	63	52.50
7	The students can share ideas in the question-answer session.	70	58.33
8	The students can learn how to present well and how to answer questions.	50	41.67
9	There is an interaction between the lecturer and the students.	45	37.50

The following are some of the students' positive comments on the use of oral presentation in the classroom. Some grammatical mistakes may be found in

the students' writing but the comments are still intelligible.

Student F: *From my opinion the strength of the teaching and learning process is from the presentation type of teaching. This type of teaching really makes the student active or can be called student centered learning process. This is really good for the student because they are ask to be active but still under the supervision of the lecturer. The lecturer didn't do the spoon feeding activity to the student. They ask to learn by them self and also search about more explanation from others resources. But in the end of the presentation activity the lecturer give more explanation about the material and also the lecturer clear about a misunderstanding from the student about their explanation.*

Student NR: *The teaching and learning process in this course is by involve the student to more active by presenting the material. By doing this, students search the material from any sources and creatively make the material to be an interesting slide that they will present. This activity make the student more creative to use any source and information from web or books. Presentation activity also include present the material and also discussion time for student to discuss the presentation. Discussion time make the student brave to express their opinion or just asking the question. ... Searching material by any sources by students it selves, make them more understand. Because before they present the material, they should understand the material first before they deliver it in front of the class. And also make them realize they responsibility, they*

have to prepare the slide for the presentation, search appropriate material related to their part and they should have good team work to discuss the material or answering the question when they present it in the class.

Student MS: *This course using the group work activity, so I can cooperate with my friends. It makes us help each other if there are some materials that I don't understand about. ... The obligation to find alone the materials, also make us be independent in this study, so we don't depend on our lecturer and we will understand more about the materials. ... The presentation activity makes us try hard to understand the materials, so we can explain it to our friends. And then, every student are given the chance to ask question during the presentation, it makes students be more active and it can help them to practice their English*

Student VA: *By presentation, the teacher gave the students chance to speak up, learned how to speak up in front of many people and build self-confidence to speak in English. It is very important for me as a future teacher to have good speaking skill to teach my students in the future, because outside the classroom I and also my friends has less chance to speak in English. In present the materials, the lecture asked the students to find others resources of the materials. It makes students more creative, active, and developed their knowledge. After the presentation, the lecture always gave feedback to the students and explained about missing points of the materials and adding some information. It makes the students*

more comprehend the materials and not confused.

Student SA: ... *And the last aspect comes from the activities in the classroom. In applied linguistics class we have oral presentations. This activity can build the communications not only between the students and the students, but the students and the lecturer.*

Table 2
Disadvantages of Using Oral Presentation

	Disadvantages	N	%
1	Some students are passive in the teaching and learning process.	35	29.17
2	Some students do not pay attention and make noise in the presentation.	30	25.00
3	Some students who are not presenting would not read or study the material.	36	30.00
4	Some members of the group do not prepare for the presentation.	15	12.50
5	When presenting, some members just read, not try to explain.	25	20.83
6	Some groups do not present well so the other students do not understand the material.	25	20.83
7	The students should read a lot to understand the material before presentation.	50	41.67
8	Some material is not easy to understand.	40	33.33
9	It is boring to have an oral presentation every meeting.	38	31.67

The following are some of the students' negative comments on the use of oral presentation in the classroom.

Student GP: *Unfortunately, some students in our class were passive. They were discouraged to ask questions to the presenters. ... Sometimes, in a group, there are only some students who work. That also happened to this course. Not all the students worked. I just wondered, why did they not want to work together? I think that is going to be better if they cooperate.*

Student FP: *The weakness is related to the students' attitude. Students tend to just focusing on the materials that they will present. So, when the other students present their materials, only few of students who are actively involved in question and answer session. Sometimes they don't know about their own material, moreover about their friends' material.*

Student FK: *The weakness is coming from the students. When some students were asked to present a topic in front of the class, other students prefer to talk with their friends than giving their attention to those who stand in front of the class. Some students often think that they already have their chance to present so they did not want to listen to their friends. It sometime makes the class be noisy when one group of students talk and other also talk in the different topic in the same class. For the teaching and learning process, since this course is based on the learner's centre when each group has a chance to present a certain topic, the students just focus on their own topic and sometimes did not pay attention to other groups.*

Student Y: *I think learning through group work presentation also has the disadvantages. It is because some of the students only study at home if it is their group turn to present the material while if it is not they don't study at all. That is why sometimes the students do not know what they have to ask in question and answer terms because they don't read the material at home and don't understand what should be asked. Besides that the problems are also found in the groups who are not prepared well in presenting the material so that they are not ready at all in presenting the materials. That is why they get difficulties in answer their friend questions.*

Student AA: *... not all the materials are easy, the materials are quite difficult to understand. Sometimes the students don't understand about the materials is not only from the difficulties of the materials but also from the way the presenter present the material.*

Student AB: *In teaching and learning process/activity, some students sometimes feel boring with presentation the material all of time. They do not pay attention with their friends' talk in front of the class; they have their own business on their seat and make noisy. It can bother their other friends.*

Table 1 shows that most of the students (84.17%) felt that oral presentation could make them become more independent in learning as they should read and understand the material by themselves before they could ask for

help from the other members of the group, from their classmates and the lecturer. They even had to find some parts of the material through internet or from other sources by themselves. Consequently, they would be active in the learning process outside and in the classroom. The students (79.17%) also found this activity could build their self-confidence as they could express themselves orally in front of the class. Besides, they could put their English into practice, mostly orally and partly in writing, in interactional communication with their classmates and lecturer. Furthermore, the data show that half of the students needed someone to help them in learning, and the other half could learn by themselves.

Table 2 shows the drawbacks of this technique. Some students (almost 30%) were not interested in learning using this technique. They showed their disinterest by not reading the material (30%), not preparing for presentation (12.50%), and doing something else or making noise in the classroom (25%). For certain students, oral presentation might not be their learning strategy preference.

From the observation in the classroom, there were only two or three students in each class who were passive for all time throughout the semester. But from time to time those who made noise in the classroom were different students. They might feel bored at times when they needed to read a lot or when they happened to have difficult material on a topic.

In conclusion, oral presentation is a teaching and learning technique which can be used to promote college students' autonomy in learning. Oral presentation could make the students become more independent in learning and it could also build their self-confidence.

However, this technique may not be suitable for all the students. The students may also lose their interest

when this technique is used all the time for the whole semester, and consequently it will become ineffective. Therefore, the lecturer should occasionally vary the teaching and learning technique.

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