

Implementing a Virtual Presentation Program in ESL Classrooms

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Abstract—One of the skills that graduates today need to acquire is being able to present their ideas in front of an audience. However, it is becoming extremely challenging for today's educators to monitor individual students' presentation skills and for students to adequately practice their presentation skills in front of their classmates due to increasing class sizes, time, and logistical constraints. This problem, however, can be partially overcome by using technology such as the Virtual-i Presenter program (ViP), which enables students to record and practice oral presentations using Power point and a web cam. This technology was introduced in a presentations skills class for English as a Second Language (ESL) students. This pilot study aimed to provide an insight on how undergraduates' presentation skills can be honed via the use of new technologies in the language learning process. Using ViP technology, students were able to recreate the reality of presentations and practice their presentations multiple times during their self-learning time, without impacting on normal class time. Lecturers were then able to evaluate individual presentations as class time was no longer a constraint and provide feedback to improve future delivery. Students were surveyed using questionnaires to help determine their views on improvements in delivery and confidence, language, content and organization, non verbal communication, and the ViP program itself. Results from the survey indicated positive outcome from students and lecturers using this program. The ability of practice presentations multiple times seemed to help improve fluency, presentation content, and confidence. However, language skills such as intonation and pronunciation could not be improved while practicing and could only be identified after feedback was obtained from lecturers.

Index Terms—Learning technology, oral presentation skills, Virtual-i Presenter (ViP) software.

I. INTRODUCTION

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

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education [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 famous Swiss 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 importance of great communication skills and in addition to that, it also highlights the need for preparing 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 are declined 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 Asians. 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 Lists, 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].

Due to the overwhelming fear, a majority of second language learners 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 reference [7]. To add to the list, Onwuegbuzie et al., reference [8] and Von Worde [9] 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 result many L2 college students lack competency in speaking, and most have difficulties with pronunciation. This affects students' confidence therefore

making them unwilling to communicate in the target language for fear of being ridiculed or, simply, for being wrong [6].

Apart from the escalating anxiety level, another issue in the education of oral communication is the hindrance of facility. The limited numbers of classrooms concurrently increase the number of students in every class which leads to the inability to monitor all students in a learner-centered classroom, making discipline more difficult [6]. In addition to that, introducing communicative speaking activities with an average of 40 students generates too much noise and, in the process, may distract teachers and students studying nearby [10]. Cochrane [11] in his 2009 study also highlight the same issue whereby many engineering departments, are currently experiencing a growth in enrolments which is translating to larger classroom sizes. Unfortunately, this is impacting on the ability for students to acquire oral presentation skills because in-class oral presentations can take over limited lecture or lab time which is needed for other critical technical material. Therefore, this tends to limit students' speaking time and somehow promote one form or another of a teacher centered environment [6].

Since there are various concerns about oral presentation skills, there is much debate on how it can be taught to students and according to Cochrane [11], it is generally agreed that these skills can best be improved through practice and feedback of oral presentations. This concurred with an earlier research by Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick [12] as they suggested that teachers should support students to take control of their own learning and develop self-regulation as learners. One such practice is to 'facilitate the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning' and subsequently provide opportunities for students to self-monitor and judge their progress [2].

One of the methods to incorporate all the solution to improve oral presentation skills is by using technology. Technology in language learning is not new. Teachers and institutions have begun using technology in teaching and learning as they are aware technology can accommodate students' different learning styles. Technology offers an assortment of tools that learners can mix and match to best suit their individual learning styles and increase their academic success [13]. In 1970's and 80's the Audio Lingual Method (ALM) was introduced and was later replaced by Communicative Language Teaching in 1980's and 1990's [14]. In 1990s, the education world was dominated by a powerful tool called internet. Since then, many new approaches, methods and software, technologies have been introduced. Electronic Communication is seen now as a catalyst in language teaching. The World Wide Web has taken a different look and challenged to educators thus making language teaching more feasible. As digital natives from the 'wired' Net Generation permeate today's classrooms, and educators adapt to students' digital expectations, exploring the pedagogical use of educational technology is essential for today's faculty.

Speech delivery is seen as one of the most daunting and challenging task that a student or professional has to face. According to Crossing and Ward [15] the fear of delivering a speech or oral presentation ranks as the number one fear among most people. Furthermore, Krannic [3] explains that

the acceptance of a new position often requires promoted individuals to deliver a speech or presentation to their newly assigned supervisor(s) and departmental co-workers which can be very daunting. A survey conducted on Monash university business graduates, stated that the poor emphasis on formal presentations in university is lagging far behind from preparing the graduates for real workplace oral communication [15].

Teaching oral presentation skills in the class room is becoming extremely challenging for today's educators due to increasing class sizes, time, and logistical constraints [16]. Student's opportunities to adequately practice their presentation skills in front of their classmates are very limited. Bain [17] believed that students learn effectively if they have a better 'support system'. Their support system can come from their peers and teachers. This was further supported by Grandzol & Grandzol [16] that students' engagement in highly important for a meaningful learning experience. Students need to be able to do practices together, learn and help each other out [18]. For students who learn English as a second language, oral communications skills are the ultimate goal. Practice and the ability to improve language skills through oral presentations are of particularly importance. Bain [17] suggested one important characteristic that teachers need to fulfill was 'to build rapport with students'. Two key elements he pointed out were that teachers need to understand one students' population and determine the amount of help needed and to provide individualized feedback on assignments and activities. However, with a large number of students in class, it is impossible to provide individualized & constructive feedbacks to the students. Time constraints is the major issue as teachers are more concern to complete the course content rather than addressing the students' learning needs.

One such exploration has resulted in the invention of the ViP program by Cochrane & O' Donaghue [19] that enable students to create, review and assess their own recorded presentations. Cochrane later on pursued to do a survey on the efficiency of the program in helping students improve their presentation skills and the result showed that students' overall experience with ViP was positive [11]. Recommendations from researchers to improve students' presentation skills through standardized training viewing their presentations, and comprehensive self-assessment were also supported in these studies [2], [12], [20], [21].

One possible aid to help improve oral communication skills in language training is through the use of software technology such as that provided by Virtual-i Presenter (www.virtual-i-presenter.net/). 'Virtual-i Presenter (ViP) allows students to create, review and evaluate oral presentations using a webcam and a power point presentation. The program is simple to use and allows students to practice and improve their oral presentation skills outside of classroom and still receive peer and academic feedback. The ViP program integrates a power point presentation with a digital video recording of the presenter (captured by a webcam) and recreates how a student would deliver an oral presentation in class. The ViP does not allow editing of the video or power point, but does allow the student to practice the presentation over and over until they are contented with it. The final version of the presentation is submitted and can

then be viewed and evaluated by other class members and the lecturer. The evaluation allows the presenter (student) to obtain feedback on their oral presentation skills and on the technical merits of the material presented. ViP was programmed in object oriented MS Visual Basic dotNET. It requires a PC with Power point 2003 installed, a webcam, and microphones/speakers. The webcam is automatically detected by the software' [11].

II. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

A. Context of the Study

The Virtual-I Presenter (ViP) was introduced to the students of University Technology MARA from the Hotel Management Faculty and the Law Faculty. These students were required to undergo four hours of English lesson a week. In this course, students were exposed to various techniques and strategies to improve their presentation skills. It is also meant to develop strategies and skills in order for them to make effective oral presentations. In addition to this, this English Lesson is also aimed to emphasize on the importance of verbal and non-verbal communication skills and using visual aids appropriately in oral presentations. The speech presentation assignment was worth 90% of their grade. They were asked to work on a broad range of topics; with the focus on persuading or informing the audience about a certain selected issue. Based on the issue chosen, they created a 15 minute-oral presentation. Because there were 28 students and only 2 contact hours a week, ViP program was adopted to assist students in practicing and improving their oral presentation skills.

In addition, the students from the Law Faculty (Foundation Programme), Shah Alam were also introduced to ViP. These students were in their first semester where they were offered BEL313 (Introduction to Critical Thinking). There are two written assignments and one oral presentation (forum) for this course. The forum includes 20% of their ongoing grade. They were asked to work in groups of four on current debatable topics; with the focus of arguing, refuting and persuading the audience on the selected issue within a 20 ten assignments and one oral presentation (forum) for this course before they were assessed. It was impossible for the lecturer to give constructive comments individually as there were a total of 30 students in class. ViP was introduced to the students. They record their forum (with PowerPoint slides) as practice and the lecturer gave comments outside the classroom hours.

B. Data Collection Techniques

The survey data on the use of ViP was collected through questionnaires posted via facebook through the survey monkey website- a research technology tool, where it was being customized to both hotel management and law students. It is necessary to conduct the survey via facebook and survey monkey as students were allowed to participate in the survey based on voluntarily basis. Prior to answering of questionnaires, the students and lecturer had a session whereby the videos were reviewed and commented upon. Questionnaires were given out to students once they have

completed their presentation. There were 5 sections in the questionnaires which are (1) delivery and confidence, (2) language, (3) content and organization, (4) non verbal communication and (5) the program Virtual I presenter program itself.

III. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The following provides an analysis and summary of the survey responses from students on the program. Each survey question was answered by 60 to 63 students, who gave marks ranging from 1 to 4, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree.

A. Delivery and Confidence

Overall results indicated students believed that using ViP helped them make a better delivery in terms of speech rate and managing sequences of their oral presentations. Sixty three students answered the 5 questions on delivery and confidence, which asked if vocal improvement, time management, delivery format, spoken clarity, and eye contact where improved using ViP. Students gave an average rating of 3.18 (between Agree and Strongly Agree) with a standard deviation of 0.065 (Table I).

The ViP program allows students to practice as many times as they want, hence, it allows students to practice and improve their presentations until they are close to perfection. The questionnaire results show that almost all students agreed that the use of ViP makes them more confident and have a better speech delivery.

TABLE I: ANSWERS PROVIDED BY STUDENTS ON PERCEIVED IMPROVEMENT OF DELIVERY AND CONFIDENCE BY USING ViP.

Answers (n=63)					
	1	2	3	4	Rating Average
Improvement in (rate of speech, pitch, pauses, volume.	6.3% (4)	6.3% (4)	44.4% (28)	42.9% (27)	3.24
Manage my time -presentation meets requirement	6.3% (4)	4.8% (3)	50.8% (32)	38.1% (24)	3.21
Delivery: natural, not memorized, read, use of key words and notes	6.3% (4)	6.3% (4)	55.6% (35)	31.7% (20)	3.13
Speak clearly-enough to be heard clearly	6.3% (4)	1.6% (1)	54.0% (34)	38.1% (24)	3.24
Maintained eye contact with audience	6.3% (4)	17.5% (11)	36.5% (23)	39.7% (25)	3.10

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree
Indirectly, the multiple practice opportunities seem to help lower the apprehension of speaking before presenting in front of a group of individuals.

B. Language

The majority of students agreed that their fluency improved with the repeated usage of the software. An overall average score of 3.12 was given on whether the use of ViP helped students pay more attention to grammar, fluency, and speech flow.

Intonation and pronunciation could not be improved through the software because it doesn't allow for immediate feedback. Although peers and lecturer are allowed to give comments and feedback, learner's autonomy will only take place after the feedback, unlike real life oral presentations where the presenter may be interrupted during the presentation. Fluency, however, was the skill that students seemed to pay close attention to while using ViP.

C. Content and Organization

With reference to presentation content and organization, multiple recordings of the ViP seemed to assist students formulate a better framework for clearly expressing their central idea. Sixty one students answered questions on whether ViP helped them improve the introduction, central idea, sub points, and conclusions, and an overall score of 3.07 ("Agree") was given.

Half of the respondents also strongly agreed that they were able to come up with a better conclusion to their presentations. In fact, they also agreed that with repeated efforts in using the software, it also helped them come up with a better introduction for their presentation.

D. Non verbal Communication

The ability to visually see themselves present, gave students a better understanding of the importance of non verbal communications skills.

A high number of respondents believe that they were able to improve their presentations once they saw their videos begin displayed. For example, they were able to communicate their ideas better by portraying certain non verbal communication cues such as varying their voice pitch and projecting their voice well, instead of talking in a monotonous voice. On the other hand, little emphasis on slides presentation was given by the students due to the absence of mark allocations for slide presentation.

IV. EVALUATION OF THE SYSTEM

Most of the students find the ViP software to be helpful in improving their oral communication skills (Table II) The program enabled the students to practice, organize and review presentations so as to improve and enhance their presentation. This software also helped the students to be aware of the importance of presentation skills and thus made it more interesting for them compared to giving a single ordinary classroom presentation. The ability to preview the mark scheme and evaluation weightings was also well received.

TABLE II: EVALUATION OF THE ViP SYSTEM.

Questions	Answers (n=60-61)				Rating Average
	1	2	3	4	
I find having ViP is useful	8.2% (5)	9.8% (6)	59.0% (36)	23.0% (14)	2.97
The ViP has	8.2%	11.5%	54.1%	26.2%	2.98

helped me to set my target	(5)	(7)	(33)	(16)	
I find feedback from my peers useful in helping my delivery technique	8.2% (5)	16.4% (10)	42.6% (26)	32.8% (20)	3.00
I find I have improved my overall performance	8.3% (5)	13.3% (8)	45.0% (27)	33.3% (20)	3.03
This exercise has made me aware of the importance of presentation skills	8.2% (5)	3.3% (2)	59.0% (36)	29.5% (18)	3.10
This exercise was accurate and fair in accessing oral presentation skills	8.2% (5)	3.3% (2)	57.4% (35)	31.1% (19)	3.11

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree

V. CONCLUSION

The use of ViP technology in language teaching and learning has allowed for a different form of learning to take place whereby students can practice oral presentations multiple times outside of class room time emulating a virtual presentation. Students were able to learn from observing themselves present and thus improve their skills over time. Nonetheless, live presentations are still pertinent and as such cannot be merely substituted without any form of feedback and responses from the audience and lecturer alike.

Students on the whole provided positive feedback on the usage of ViP software, particularly in the areas of improving crucial presentation skills as reported by the survey conducted. Students are more inclined towards practicing for their presentation at their own free will and learning time. Thus, this has greatly minimized the reticence and passivity amongst students whose communication apprehension is initially visible.

This software application is also seen as a solution for large classes since lecture time for the oral presentation is becoming more unfeasible. This software program eases classroom management and therefore improving oral presentation skills should not be seen as a problem to educators.

VI. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

This tool could also be used to overcome issues when students miss classes due to extra-curricular activities. If students are not able to make it to class for their presentation assessment, they could record their presentation using ViP and the lecturer could assess it online. A similar tool called Lecture Capture was used in the University of North Carolina. The faculty was addressing the issue of students-athletes who frequently missed-class due to travel and tournaments. Faculty members were requested to record their lecture, discussions in class together with PowerPoint slides or on

board writings. These recordings were accessible to the students-athletes to be viewed while they were on travel or tournaments [22]. Although the goal is different from VIP, the point that can be made here is students who were not able to make it to class for presentations and assessments could record their presentations and the lecturer could grade the students based on the recorded presentations.

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