



Implications of Oral Presentation for Fostering Learners' Autonomy: A Case Study with Saudi Learners Majoring in English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

The present paper focuses on pinpointing the implications of Oral presentation for fostering learners' autonomy by employing experimental and qualitative research methods. The study investigated a group of participants comprised of 15 students majoring in English as A foreign language (EFL) at Qassim University. The key data was collected from the participants who were interviewed through a focusing group interview conducted on purpose to obtain a deeper insight into Saudi learners' perceptions of how oral presentation provides opportunities for them to foster autonomy learning. The results are enlightening, as the students of College of Science and Arts in Al Asyah comprised in the sample find an overall positive satisfaction with the oral presentation as they believed that oral presentation did not only help them decide on materials, plan and prepare it for a class presentation but also it provided them with motivation to learn English, gained self-esteem, confidence and become active learners. Finally, oral presentation stimulated learners to create their own identity of learning the English language and enabled them to sort out their learning materials that satisfy their learning needs.

Keywords:

EFL, learners' autonomy, oral presentation, Saudi learners,

INTRODUCTION

When teachers activate Oral presentation in the classroom; it guarantees that they can provide students with additional motivation to study English. Oral presentation does more than just give students an opportunity to practice language skills; It also gives them the role to teach something to their peers. If the activity is properly systematized, students will be able to work independently to produce an effective presentation. This can lead to higher levels of motivation for the students involved, as they are able to see the results of their hard work when they are successful in the presentation that they give. One of the joys of teaching a presentation class is seeing students gain confidence, self-esteem, and autonomy while they are working independently, or as a small group, to produce and give an effective presentation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Oral presentations have been shown to be extremely successful with respect to improving learners' L2 skills and increasing their autonomy. For example, Girard, Pinar, and Trapp (2011) found that using oral presentations in their classroom lead to greater class interaction and participation, an increased interest in learning, and noticeable improvements in their students' communication and presentation skills. King (2002) added that oral presentations have been shown to help bridge the gap between language study and language use; that presentations require students to use all four language skills in a naturally integrated way; and that presentations have been shown to encourage students to become active and autonomous learners.

The Benefits of Using Oral Presentation in the Language Classroom

For most language teachers, Oral presentation can be beneficial in the classroom in different ways such as students-centered. It requires the use of all four language skills which provides students with realistic language tasks. It does have value outside the language classroom which improves students' motivation.

One of the main benefits of using presentations in the classroom is that oral presentations are student-centered. When students are asked to give an oral presentation it is one of the few times in the language classroom that the students themselves have direct control of both the content and the flow of the classroom. Apple & Kikuchi, (2007). This is because the students who are presenting have the ability to choose the topic that they want to talk about, select the language items that they want to use to talk about that topic, and decide how they will explain that topic to their classmates. With little or no intervention from the teacher, a properly scaffold presentation can result in multiple opportunities for students to improve their English in a context in which the students themselves are acting as both teachers and learners.

Interactions between the presenters and the audience provide both sets of participants with numerous opportunities to practice their English abilities with other students in an authentic manner. Oral presentations also provide students with a process-driven activity that requires them to use English, not just while they are giving the presentation itself, but also while they are preparing to present. One good example of this is group presentations. Group presentations require students to work together to plan and prepare for their presentations. During group work students can be encouraged to use English to negotiate meaning with the other members of their group and to work together, in English, to plan how they will present their ideas to the other members of the class.

This facilitates English use to meet a specific goal, in an authentic way, and with very little intervention from the teacher.

Another benefit of oral presentations is that they require students to use all four language skills; writing, reading, speaking and listening. Most teachers recognize the spoken component of presenting, as students are required to speak when giving their presentations. However, properly structured academic presentations also require students to research and plan out their presentation. This requires students to use their L2 reading and writing skills. Students also have the opportunity to practice their writing skills when they are asked to give presentations that include some type of visual component. When they are preparing for these presentations students will have to write out the appropriate information on their poster or in their PowerPoint slides. Finally, students have the opportunity to practice their listening skills when they act as the audience members for the other groups' presentations. If these students are given a simple task to do during the presentation or are expected to use the knowledge disseminated through the presentation for a specific purpose, this will allow them to use this opportunity to practice their listening skills. The communicative nature of presentations also allows audience members to improve their listening skills more than listening to a tape or a lecture would because they are able to confirm their understanding by asking questions and interacting with the presenters.

Presentations have also been shown to improve students' abilities in ways that can be beneficial for their future employment. Živković, (2014). This is especially true in the EAP or ESP context, where there is a much higher chance that students will be asked to use English to present in their future jobs. Bruce, (2011). However, even beyond the EAP and ESP context, experience with oral presentations can be beneficial to student's future careers because many potential future employers place a high degree of importance on the communication skills that students learn during a presentation class. Nowadays many employees are looking for candidates who have the ability to give formal presentations, and the skills that students learn when they are presenting in English are transferable to their L1. As cited by Pittenger, (2004).

Oral presentations provide realistic language tasks for students to engage in. This is important because speaking tasks that have no relation to real-life language use are poor preparation for autonomy. Thornbury, (2005) remarked that presentations also provide a more authentic way of practicing English than simple speaking drills. This is because they require students to use their L2 to understand the topics they are presenting on and communicate this understanding to others. This is closer to real language use and gives students an opportunity to develop research and critical thinking skills, as well as linguistic and communicative skills.

The final benefit of using oral presentations in the language classroom is that they can provide students with additional motivation to study English. Oral presentations do more than just give students an opportunity to practice language skills; they also give students an opportunity to teach something to their peers. If the activity is properly scaffolded, students will be able to work independently to produce an effective presentation. This can lead to higher levels of motivation for the students involved, as they are able to see the results of their hard work when they are successful in the presentation that they give. One of the joys of teaching a presentation class is seeing students gain confidence, self-esteem, and autonomy while they are working independently, or as a small group, to produce and give an effective presentation.

Learners Autonomy

The concept of learner autonomy has in the last twenty years become influential as a goal in many parts of the world. Accordingly, Palfreyman and Smiths, (2003) maintain several arguments may be used in favor of developing autonomy in language learners: for example, that autonomy is a human right; that autonomous learning is more effective than other approaches to learning; and that learners need to take charge of their own learning in order to make the most of available resources, especially outside the classroom.

As Little (1991) stated that there are some attributes characterizing autonomous learners. Autonomous learners have insights into their learning styles and strategies; take an active approach to the learning task. In addition, they are willing to take risks, i.e., to communicate in the target language at all costs. Moreover, they are good guessers; attend to form as well as to the content, i.e., to place importance on accuracy as well as appropriateness.

Learner autonomy in language learning has been a topic of interest in recent years. Learner autonomy can be understood as a capacity for active, independent learning. Little (1991), for example, saw autonomy as a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action. Furthermore, Arikan & Bakla (2011) also discussed learner autonomy in blogs with 17 Turkish students. The result of the project showed that students were very interested and they were able to choose various reading texts from the internet. However, the students were at beginner level students who encountered the difficulty with new vocabularies the various texts provided. The project has shown that the students were able to apply various strategies that fostered learner autonomy.

Thus, learner autonomy can be seen as an attitude on the part of the learner towards taking control of the language learning process and assuming responsibility for the process. The ability to practice autonomy requires the learner to have an understanding of the nature of language learning and of their role in that process. The understanding of learner autonomy as capacity is important since we want to be able to conceive of learners maintaining learning autonomy in a teacher-centered classroom teaching as well as in settings such as self-directed learning. Autonomy then is something that is essential to the learner and not necessarily connected to particular learning situations.

Oral Presentation

Oral presentation skills are the integration of all major receptive and productive skills i.e.: listening, speaking, reading and writing. McDonough & Shaw (1993) state that preparing learners to give a short oral presentation in class to the rest of the group is a useful way of achieving skills integration in the classroom. It is possible to devise a fairly rudimentary evaluation sheet where small groups of students are asked to answer questions which might cover: what they thought of the presentation; was it well organized and were they able to follow the main points; could they summarize the talk for someone who was not present; did the speaker make effective use of visual support material; what advice would they give to the speaker for future presentation. This activity can thus interrelate the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills in a motivating way.

Furthermore, besides enhancing academic skills, oral presentations also contribute to a positive classroom atmosphere. Meloni & Thompson (1980) stated that the oral report gives the adult student the opportunity to establish an identity as an individual with an

interesting background and special knowledge. This leads to a more integrated and spirited class and markedly raises class interest.

From this perspective, an oral presentation is a perfect example of the activity that can be practiced while teaching through the communicative approach. Besides, during oral presentations, students are always encouraged to take an audience centered approach to communicate ideas to real people rather than merely stand up and go through the actions of delivering a speech. Nowadays the classrooms have become an ideal place where students can develop both confidence and experience by practicing these skills before the audience, who are friendly and helpful and made up of students who will have to go through more or less the same experience.

The oral presentation has been identified as one of the most effective classroom activities by both EFL and ESL teachers to promote the communicative competence of the learners who are competing in today's global village. The acquisition and learning of oral presentation skills not only enhance learners' critical thinking and analyzing abilities but also foster learners' autonomy through their growth in collaborative and interpersonal skills.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, oral presentation skill has become a major challenge for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. Although most of them spent 12 years learning English at schools before being enrolled at Universities. The fact is that most learners are not well trained at schools to practice speaking English in the class. As a result, learners rely a lot on their teachers in receiving knowledge and they do not initiate to share any sort of knowledge prepared or selected by their own preference. As such, this study is going to identify how Oral presentation is considered to be the most effective classroom activity by which learners' autonomy is fostered through their growth in a collaborative and interactive class environment.

Objectives of the Study

This paper is basically set up to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To investigate the implications of Oral presentation that fostering learners' autonomy.
2. To reveal the merits of oral presentation reflected in learners' classroom performance.

Questions of the Study

To accomplish the above-mentioned objectives, this study must find reasonable answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent can Oral presentation have implications for fostering learners' autonomy?
2. What merits provided by Oral presentation can be reflected in learners' autonomy?

Hypothesis of the Study

H1: Oral presentation stimulates learners to create their own identity of learning the English language.

H2: Oral presentation enables learners to sort out learning materials that satisfy their learning needs.

METHODS

The descriptive method was employed to conduct the study using the focusing group interview to collect the data of the study. The subjects of the study were students of English at the university level selected as an experimental group that comprised of (15) students from the 1st year who responded at the end of the teaching program responded to questions of focusing group interview in order to elicit their own views on how oral presentation affects autonomous learning.

Participants

The participants in this paper are students major in English at Qassim University in the College of Science and Arts – Al Asyah. The sample investigated is a purposive one comprised of (15) students selected as an experimental group to be interviewed via a focusing group.

Procedures

The researcher followed particular steps and procedures in conducting this paper by firstly using the focusing group interview as the main tool for data collection. To checking the interview reliability and validity, four copies of the interview questions were sent to one full professor, one associate professor, and two assistant professors of teaching English at Universities. They provided comments and suggestions as requested by the researcher. According to these comments and suggestions, the number of questions was reduced from (10) to (5) ones. The interview required (100) minutes for all the subjects to finish it. The whole experiment took (10) weeks and two hours session per week. During the experiment, twenty-one students are taught a course of listening and speaking in the experimental group. In two hours weekly class, the students in the experimental group are given the opportunity to orally present different topics of their own selection. The students are motivated by their teacher to pay no attention to mistakes and errors they might commit and try as much as possible to get rid of any feeling of anxiety and passive attitudes of speaking in public.

Instruments

The tools used for gathering data is the focus group interview as the researcher purposively trying to collect as much as views from the students about the implication of oral presentation for fostering learners' autonomy. The researcher gave the students some topics and conversations to present. After finishing their presentations, students were given some questions to answer.

Data Analysis Technique

The researcher adopted a descriptive analysis, which refers to the study of behavior from a subjective point of view. This kind of analysis measures behaviors, opinion, subjective evaluation and satisfaction rating.

Students' Views as reflected in the Focus Group Interview

1. *Have you ever been given an opportunity to practice speaking in your classroom?*
All students' replies were "yes".

2. *What do you prefer Oral presentation or teacher-centered method of teaching? Why?*

Student 1: “I prefer Oral presentation because it helps me choose the topic I want to talk about”

Student 2: “I like Oral presentation as it allows me to select the language items that I want to use to talk about any topic”.

Student 3: “I prefer Oral presentation; it helps me present my ideas to my colleagues in the classroom”.

Student 4: “I prefer Oral presentation; It provides me with opportunities to share ideas with other students in the classroom”.

Student 5: “I like Oral presentation as it allows me to use the four language skills.”

Student 6: “I prefer Oral presentation because It helps us work together, plan and prepare for my class presentation”.

Student 7: “I like to use the Oral presentation as it enables me to research and plan for my class presentation”.

Student 8: “I prefer Oral presentation because it can help me understand the topic I’m presenting and communicate it to my colleagues in the classroom”.

Student 9: “I like Oral presentation; it can provide me with motivation to study English.

Student 10: “I prefer Oral presentation because it helps me gain confidence”.

Student 11: “I prefer Oral presentation; it enables me to become more active in learning English”.

Student 12: “I prefer Oral presentation; it allows me to communicate ideas and information easily”.

Student 13: “I like Oral presentation because it can help me prepare the information by myself”

Student 14: “I prefer Oral presentation because I can be like my teacher”

Student 15: “I like Oral presentation in which I can do my all duties with no help from my teacher”.

3. *What benefits did you get from practicing Oral presentation on your learning of the English language?*

Student 1: “By practicing Oral presentation I can have control over my learning of English language”.

Student 2: “When I practice Oral presentation there is a little or no intervention from the teacher in my learning”.

Student 3: “Practicing Oral presentation gives me the freedom of selecting and preparing my learning materials”.

Student 4: “To practice Oral presentation; this can improve my understanding by asking questions and interacting with the students in the class”.

Student 5: “I can be able to use my four skills when I prepare topics for Oral presentation”

Student 6: “I can develop my own personality when I practice Oral presentation”.

Student 7: “Practicing Oral presentation allows me to select and prepare my own learning materials”

Student 8: “Oral presentation can benefit me present new information to my classmates”.

Student 9: “I developed critical thinking when I practiced Oral presentation”

Student 10: “When I practice Oral presentation I can work independently in planning items for class presentation”.

Student 11: “Listening to Oral presentation allows me to improve my listening skills more than listening to a lecture”.

Student 12: “I gained self-esteem and confidence when I practiced Oral presentation”.

Student 13: “Oral presentation gives me the opportunity to develop my research skills”.

Student 14: “Practicing Oral presentation encourages me to use English to share ideas with my colleagues in the classroom”.

Student 15: “Practicing Oral presentation offers realistic language tasks for me and my colleagues to engage in”.

4. What do you think of the teacher’s role before and after your practice of Oral presentation?

Student 1: “*The teacher is very important but after I tried Oral presentation I can depend a lot on myself*”

Student 2: “*My teacher is helpful but after I practiced Oral presentation I help myself in everything*”

Student 3: “*The teacher’s role is necessary for learning but Oral presentation taught me how to learn alone*”

Student 4: “*I can’t forget the teacher but Oral presentation helped me to use my skills*”

Student 5: “*The teacher helped me a lot but Oral presentation let me study individually*”

Student 6: “*I used to ask my teacher everything but now Oral presentation helped me search for information easily*”

Student 7: “*The teacher is important and Oral presentation too because it developed my personality*”.

Student 8: “*The teacher can help in everything but the Oral presentation helped me depend on myself more than the teacher*”.

Student 9: “*I like to attend the class to discuss any information I searched for my presentation*”

Student 10: “*Oral presentation let me in the class talk to all students with my teacher*”.

Student 11: “*Oral presentation enabled me to share some tasks of the teacher in the class*”.

Student 12: “*Oral presentation helped me practice teaching than listening to the lecture*”.

Student 13: “*The teacher is very important and by practicing Oral presentation I can teach like him*”.

Student 14: “*Oral presentation is useful for me to talk in the class*”.

Student 15: “*The role of the teacher is necessary because Oral presentation made me like my teacher in the class*”.

1. How can you describe your feelings after practicing Oral presentation?

Student 1: “*I feel that I’m much better at learning English*”.

Student 2: “*Oral presentation was very useful for me in studying alone*”.

Student 3: “*After practicing Oral presentation I could be able to prepare everything I need for my learning*”.

Student 4: “*I feel very confident when I talk in the class after I practiced Oral presentation*”.

Student 5: “*Oral presentation helped me to work hard to study alone*”.

Student 6: “*I could be able to search and study well after I practiced Oral presentation which was very useful*”.

Student 7: “*Oral presentation provided me with the courage to prepare topics for discussion in the class*”.

Student 8: “*I feel that my ability to learn is better than I was before I practiced Oral presentation*”.

Student 9: “*I liked Oral presentation because I feel studying English is easier for me than it was*”.

Student 10: “*I could not present something in the class until after I practiced Oral presentation*”.

Student 11: “*I feel with more confidence and courage after I practiced Oral presentation in the class*”.

Student 12: *“Before I practiced Oral presentation I did not use to be able to stand in front of people and talk even in English”.*

Student 13: *“I feel I’m good at studying English more than before”.*

Student 14: *“Oral presentation helped me succeed in studying English for the first time”.*

Student 15: *“I did not have the ability to study alone but now I can do many things because of Oral presentation”*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the light on the above views obtained from the learners through the focusing group interview, it was evident that Oral presentation influence is not restricted only to the environment of the class but it can also exceed the limits to include other factors that in such a way affect the overall performance of our learners academically and psychologically. The learners’ interview revealed that Oral presentation does offer a large number of implications that effectively foster the development of learners’ autonomy in various respects. These implications can be advocated by some opinions discussed for different writers in the literature review as follows:

1. The students believed that Oral presentation helped them decide on the materials, plan and prepare for it class presentation. It can provide them with motivation to study English. It does also help them gain self-esteem, confidence and enables them to become more active in learning English. It can help learners prepare information themselves and have the feeling of being like their teachers to finish duties without teachers’ intervention. Little (1991), confirmed the researcher’s claim by considering autonomy as a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action.
2. The students perceived that they can get a number of benefits from practicing Oral presentation on their learning of the English language as they can have control over learning. In preparing for Oral presentation there is little or no intervention from the teacher as Oral presentation offers them the freedom of selecting and preparing the teaching materials for class presentation. Here Apple & Kikuchi, (2007), agreed with the students’ perceptions that the students who are presenting something have the ability to choose the topic that they want to talk about, select the language items that they want to use to discuss in the topic, and decide how they will explain that topic to their classmates.
3. The oral presentation can improve learners’ comprehension, learning skills through interacting with each other in the class which in turn develops their personality, critical thinking and they can work independently in planning items for class presentation. This conforms to King (2002) when added that oral presentations have been shown to help bridge the gap between language study and language use; these presentations require students to use all four language skills in a naturally integrated way; and these presentations have been shown to encourage students to become active and autonomous learners.
4. Students believed that Oral presentation does not remove the teacher’s role from the scene but assists learners to depend a lot on themselves by providing realistic learning situations as learners can work individually while searching for information from

different resources. Oral presentation develops their personality as it caters for individualized manner of learning more than merely calling for teachers' aid. Furthermore, Oral presentation paves the way for learners to take the role of their teachers inside the class by presenting information and knowledge to their peers in an interactive way. These merits were credited by Meloni & Thompson (1980) who claimed that the Oral presentation gives the adult student the opportunity to establish an identity as an individual with an interesting background and special knowledge. This leads to a more integrated and spirited class and markedly raises class interest.

5. Finally, learners can't conceal their feelings that can be interpreted as the countless merits they have attained after practicing Oral presentation. The learners can feel much better at learning English which became easier for them than it was. Learners feel very confident and have the courage to prepare topics for discussion in their class. It's worth mentioning that by virtue of Oral presentation most learners feel that their ability to learn is better than ever before when they did not use to be able to stand in front of people and talk in English. Therefore, Thornbury, (2005) remarks were in line with the benefits the learners attained using oral presentations in the classroom as they provide them with additional motivation to study English. Oral presentations do more than just give students an opportunity to practice language skills; they also give students an opportunity to teach something to their peers.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the aim of this study was to better understand the implications of Oral presentation in fostering learners' autonomy of university students. Oral presentation proved its efficiency in fostering learner autonomy as the results indicate that Oral presentation stimulates learners to create their own identity of learning in the classroom besides enabling learners to supplement learning materials that satisfy their learning needs. The results have further shown that students perceived themselves as autonomous learners in English language learning and how teachers must move their learners towards autonomous learning by respecting their preferences, sharing them decisions, teaching contents, setting learning objectives which will finally lead them to take the responsibility for learning that increases motivation, and thus foster success rather than prescribing the learning process.

Based on the findings, the followings are recommended. First, teachers should talk to their students about the class presentation and its value reflected in their learning autonomy. Second, students must be encouraged to engage in academic activities that would in its turn promote autonomous behaviors in a pedagogical context. Third, learners should be provided with ample time for class presentations so they can get to reflect on their learning. Finally, teachers must also try to set activities out of the classes which promote learning autonomy such as outings, research projects, and academic fields activities.

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