

Factors Considered to be Important in the Delivery of an Oral Presentation in a Second Language

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Abstract

The communicative approach to English teaching is a prerequisite for English Language Teaching (ELT) students because of being prospective teachers of this language. Having students give oral presentations in front of the class is one of learner-centered activities that has been widely included in teachers' lesson plans to improve students' oral proficiency. However, students' oral presentation problems sometimes defeat the purpose of developing language skills. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to examine the factors ELT students consider to be important when making presentations in educational contexts. 160 undergraduate students from the Department of ELT were surveyed at a state university in Turkey. A 16-item questionnaire and 3 open-ended questions were applied to explore factors considered to be necessary for students in giving effective presentations in a second language. According to the results of quantitative data, it is concluded that there is no difference among the students' perceptions on delivering effective oral presentations in terms of gender, age and being freshmen or seniors. The results are discussed within the themes of clarity of speech and voice quality, correctness of language, and interaction with the audience. Further theme analysis was made through qualitative data to gain deeper insights into students' perceptions and pedagogical implications are delineated accordingly.

Keywords: The communicative approach, oral presentation, foreign language speaking anxiety, public speaking

1. Introduction

To have an academic progress at universities, the need to present a professional image is more important than ever in today's fast-changing world. Communicating effectively is extremely crucial to gain success as a student. It is in this context where ELT students find themselves more obliged to improve their spoken communication skills in order to function effectively in all academic subjects, and later in their careers as English teachers (Živkovic&Stojkovic, 2011).

Even though oral presentations have been considered a learner-centered activity in the communicative approach that develops communicative competence, in Turkish context both students and teachers have to cope with pressure of examinations and curricular demands; thus, "Unfamiliar activities having a communicative or process orientation were not highly valued by students from traditional backgrounds...a gap between the current level of performance and the intended learning experience results in a breakdown of language production and frustration for learners" (Ellis, 1996, p.214). Turkish students are often more successful in grammatical competence than in pragmatic and discourse competence. When they have to express their ideas in actual performance, most students feel frustrated and such frustration sometimes causes their performance to deteriorate, which in turn, makes public speaking to be a face-threatening experience.

One essential way to support such students is surely giving them oral presentations. Oral presentation skills are necessary for academic success as they lead students to enter into debate and sustained reasoning (Morley, 2006). They enable students to participate fully in their learning, show their ability to communicate, and help them develop competencies in an area of their future working places.

It is in this context that, at the very beginning of the semester the researchers made some observations within their classroom environments. As instructors, they were taking the course "Oral communication and public speaking" in two different classrooms with the same syllabus 3 hours a week and coming together to share their experiences following the observations they made within the class. After a short time period, they diagnosed a problem; most students were either nervous or reluctant about making oral presentations in front of the class. Bearing these in mind, the researchers decided to find out more about the students' perceptions towards delivering oral presentations in English. In order to have a representative sampling, they included all ELT Department students in their study.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Questions

The aim of the present study is to explore students' opinions on factors predicting effective oral presentations in ELT classrooms according to different variables. The research questions sought to be answered in the study are as follows:

1. Is there a significant difference between delivering effective oral presentations and presenters' gender?
2. Is there a significant difference between delivering effective oral presentation and presenters' age?
3. Is there a significant difference between freshmen's and seniors' perceptions on delivering effective oral presentation?
4. What are students' perceptions towards whole oral presentation phase?

2.2 Participants

The study was conducted on 160 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th class students attending ELT department of a state university during the spring term of academic year 2016-2017. The study sample was elected randomly through “Simple Random Sampling” technique in which the number of elements entering sample from each different elements of the field is determined completely by chance (Karasar, 2005: 113). The descriptive features of the participants are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive features of the Participants

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	109	68
Female	51	32
Total	160	100
Age		
18	27	17
19	32	20
20	36	22,5
21	31	19
22	20	12,5
23_over	14	9
Total	160	100
Class		
1	40	25
2	40	25
3	40	25
4	40	25
Total	160	100

According to Table 1, 109 male and 51 female ELT students participated in the study. Also, the students’ ages range between 18 and 23. 27 students are at the age of 18; 32 students are at the age of 19; 36 students are at the age of 20; 31 students are at the age of 21; 20 students are at the age of 22 and 14 students are at the age of 23 and above. Moreover, 40 students for each class level attended to this study.

2.3 Research Design

The study used a mixed methods approach in which quantitative data collection and analysis was followed by qualitative data collection and analysis. According to Creswell (2003) and Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), in mixed research, a current phenomenon is searched in its own environment with different data sources; the data is collected through both qualitative and quantitative research methods, then analyzed and interpreted. While quantitative method was used to confirm the relationships between different variables with a larger sample in order to reach some degree of generalizability, qualitative method was applied to discover themes regarding participants’ perceptions toward the phenomenon. Therefore, in the present study the researchers tried to shed some light into

the existing literature concerning the use of oral presentations in second language classroom environment by applying a mixed methods design.

2.4 Data Collection

During the study, two different instruments were used to collect data. The questionnaire developed by Ootshi and Heffernan (2008) was applied as the first tool to collect the data for the quantitative phase of the study. The questionnaire consisted of sixteen items with three components; clarity of speech and voice quality, correctness of the language, and interaction with the audience. In order to spread the responses from the participants out (Likert, 1932), item statements were categorized into positively and negatively phrased statements. Each item was measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale (for positive statements, from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree; and for negative statements the coding was reversed). Chronbach's alpha was checked to establish the reliability of the instrument developed for gathering the data for the study. This figure was determined to be .843 for the whole questionnaire and .855 for clarity of speech and voice quality, .605 for correctness of the language and .668 for interaction with the audience, thus reliable (Ootshi and Heffernan, 2008: 70).

On the other hand, qualitative phase of the study was designed to generate in-depth and rich descriptions about students' perceptions toward delivering oral presentations in the class. Three common interview formats in qualitative research were suggested: *The informal conversational interview*, *the general interview guide approach*, and *the standardized open-ended interview* (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). In the study, open-ended questions were asked in order to explore the students' perceptions extensively. Since the interviews were conducted with several participants, the phrasing and sequence of these open-ended questions was determined in advance to reduce bias. Therefore, the format of the interviews can be best categorized as a standardized open-ended interview. The questions were loosely structured to allow participants to express their opinions and experiences freely. To ensure the content validity of the instrument, two researchers who had expertise in interviewing reviewed the process. Pilot tests were also conducted with two ELT students from the defined population of the study. Revisions were made after each reviewing occasion. 40 students were chosen randomly to gather qualitative data.

2.5 Data Analysis

The quantitative data have been analyzed through SPSS 22.00 package programme. In order to understand whether the sum points of the students' responses on the questionnaire and its components are different or not, one sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) was applied to the data and it was found that the variables do not show normal distribution. Thus, Mann – Whitney U and Kruskal – Wallis non-parametrical tests have been used to analyze the sub problems of this study.

The qualitative data has been analyzed through thematic analysis. Four steps has been followed during this process; familiarization with the data and coding, determining the themes by collecting and analyzing the codes, organizing and defining data according to codes and themes, interpreting the results relating the research questions (Şimşek and Yıldırım, 2008:237-238).

Guidelines provided by Holstein and Gubrium (2003) were considered during the planning of the interview process. All the interviews were conducted face to face, one participant at a time, in quiet and isolated rooms. Mean duration of the interviews was 11.57 minutes (range: 8-16 minutes). A high quality digital audio recorder was used during all of the interviews. Before starting the interview,

the researcher explained the study, the contents of the consent form, and the questions in the interview. Confidentiality was assured. After the consent forms were signed, the participants were asked interview questions.

After applying interview questions, content analysis technique was used to analyze the data. All data were analyzed manually. First, all data were transcribed. While extracting the themes from the data the research questions were taken into account. The data gathered from the interviews were put to the files and one more copy was obtained for the other researcher from the field to make the content analysis and code the data to the themes. After the coding process, the researchers came together. Each theme formed from the data was examined and a consensus was reached. Depending on the themes coded, the researchers made frequency counts, and interpreted them within percentages. While discussing them, the most attractive opinions of the participants were chosen and they were directly quoted to support the findings. While making use of quotations participants were given different names. A sample to show the coding process for the themes was given below in Table 2.

Table 2. A Sample for the Theme Analysis

<u>Question number</u>	<u>Theme</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>Related quotation</u>
1	Appearance	clothes	“I give importance on being well-dressed
		lightening	“The light, because it affects my mood and performance.”

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The Quantitative Study

The first problem of the study is indicated as “Is there a significant difference between effective oral presentation and presenters’ gender?” Mann – Whitney U test has been used to analyze the problem in terms of gender variable and the findings are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. The results of Mann-Whitney U test showing the perceptions of the students on effective oral presentation and gender variable

Components	Gender	N	Sum of Ranks	Mean Rank	U	Z	P
Clarity of speech and voice quality	Male	109	8661,50	79,46	2666,500	-,416	,677
	Female	51	4218,50	82,72			
Correctness of the language	Male	109	8649,50	79,35	2654,500	-,460	,645
	Female	51	4230,50	82,95			
Interaction with the audience	Male	109	9050,50	83,03	2503,500	-1,041	,298
	Female	51	3829,50	75,09			
Sum	Male	109	8819,00	80,91	2735,000	-,163	,870
	Female	51	4061,00	79,63			

p>0,05

Table 3 shows whether the perceptions of the students on effective oral presentation and its components according to gender variable or not. According to the results, it is found that there is no significant difference between male and female students' perceptions on effective oral presentation procedures ($p>0.05$). From this finding, it can be concluded that both male and female students have same abilities in terms of speech and voice quality, correct use of language and audience interaction.

The second problem of the study is indicated as "Is there a significant difference between effective oral presentation and presenters' age?" Kruskal –Wallis analysis was conducted to analyze the problem in terms of age variable and the findings are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. The results of Kruskal Wallis test showing perceptions of the students on effective oral presentation and its components according to age variable

Components	Age	N	Mean Ranks	s.d.	X ²	P	Dif.
Clarity of speech and voice quality	18	27	76,63	9,503	5	,091	-
	19	32	89,61				
	20	36	76,38				
	21	31	63,53				
	22	20	98,20				
	23 above	14	90,04				
Correctness of the language	18	27	68,31	10,228	5	,069	-
	19	32	85,72				
	20	36	89,54				
	21	31	62,90				
	22	20	92,25				
	23 above	14	91,00				
Interaction with the audience	18	27	72,06	2,712	5	,744	-
	19	32	80,42				
	20	36	86,78				
	21	31	83,87				
	22	20	83,10				
	23 above	14	69,64				
Sum	18	27	66,78	10,514	5	,062	-
	19	32	87,80				
	20	36	84,68				
	21	31	64,92				
	22	20	98,95				
	23 above	14	87,68				

$p>0,05$

Table 4 shows whether the perceptions of the students on effective oral presentation change according to age variable or not. According to the results, it is found that there is no significant difference between students' perceptions on delivering effective oral speech for age variable ($p > 0.05$). When the data is analyzed in terms of mean ranks, it can be said that students have more positive attitudes on effective oral skills when they get older owing to having more experiences on delivering speech. However, the mean rank of age 21 ($R=64,92$) may indicate that the students do not give enough importance to improve their oral speech skills in terms of speech, voice and language quality for the last year of their education in order to complete their theoretical knowledge better to graduate from the university and prepare for the national formal exams to be assigned as a teacher.

Mann – Whitney U test has been conducted to find whether the perceptions of the students on effective oral presentation change according to freshmen and seniors or not. The results are given in Table 5.

Table 5. The results of Mann-Whitney U test showing the perceptions of the students on effective oral presentation according to being freshmen and seniors variable

Components	Grade	N	Sum of Ranks	Mean Rank	U	Z	P
Clarity of speech and voice quality	Freshmen	40	1537,50	38,44	717,500	-,798	,425
	Seniors	40	1702,50	42,56			
Correctness of the language	Freshmen	40	1515,50	37,89	695,500	-1,012	,312
	Seniors	40	1724,50	43,11			
Interaction with the audience	Freshmen	40	1593,50	39,84	773,500	-,262	,794
	Seniors	40	1646,50	41,16			
Sum	Freshmen	40	1460,00	36,50	640,000	-1,543	,123
	Seniors	40	1780,00	44,50			

$p > 0,05$

At the end of the analysis, it is found that there is not a significant difference between freshmen's and seniors' perceptions on effective oral presentation. However, according to mean rank points, it can be said that the first year students improve their skills on delivering effective oral presentation in following years. Thus, it can be concluded that when they get older, the students slightly get over such negative feelings as foreign language speaking anxiety on delivering effective oral presentations.

The main concern of this study was to see if the students with different gender, age and class grade have any problems on delivering effective oral speech and get detailed information about their presentation phase and the contribution of these presentations for their individual and professional development. According to the results of quantitative data, it was found that there is no important difference among students' perceptions on delivering effective oral speech in terms of gender. Namely, this can be owing to the fact that both male and female students are exposed to the same materials, the same methods and are usually taught by the same teachers. Also, it can be said that the students get equal chance in classes on delivering effective speech for oral presentations.

It was also found that there is no important difference among students' perceptions on delivering effective oral speech in terms of age and grades. From this finding, it can be concluded that students with different ages have same feelings for the effectiveness of their oral performance. However, from the findings, it can be said that when the students get older, their ideas for the quality of their presentations can become more positive and their anxiety level for effective oral presentation decrease as they deliver more speeches in different situations for different goals and gain more experience.

3.2 The Qualitative Study

With respect to the qualitative part of the study, four themes emerged for the first question; "Before having your presentation in class, what do you get prepared for especially? Why?" The themes were "Appearance", "Performance", "Content" and "Presentation Aids". Some quotes and the frequencies of the themes mentioned by the students are provided as the percentages.

Table 6. Results of Question 1

Before having your presentation in class, what do you get prepared for especially?	Percentages
Appearance	2.5%
Performance	41%
Content	31%
Presentation Aids	25.5%

Results showed that "Performance" and "Content" are the two most frequent themes provided by the students with 41% and 31%, accordingly. For these students, before they deliver their oral presentations, they get prepared for their performance and they give importance to the content of their presentation. The plausible reason for the theme "Performance" can be the fact that no matter which year students they are, students generally don't feel themselves comfortable to speak in a second language in front of a crowd; therefore, they need practicing their speech again and again on their own before the real experience. They also revealed the theme "content" because most students can think that if they get prepared for their topic they will talk about it is more likely that during their presentation the flow of the session won't be interrupted. The following are some quotations from the participants:

"I usually practice my speech before the real experience." (Student comment)

"My speech. I cannot speak fluently and one should know what to say when he/she stays there." (Student comment)

"I get prepared for the topic because if I don't know what I am going to talk about, I may look like someone just having memorized the presentation." (Student comment)

"My subject. I must be able to respond to every kind of question." (Student comment)

"Presentation Aids" was the next frequent theme emerged from the question with 25.5%. Thus, it can be concluded that students prepare various presentation aids before delivering their oral presentations. The possible reason for this theme can be the fact that students believe visual materials such as posters, pictures or videos make the audience more involved in the session and attract their attention to the presentation all of which contribute to the effectiveness of a presentation. The sample quotations for this theme are as follows:

“Pictures and videos about my presentation because they make the audience to concentrate on my presentation.” (Student comment)

“I would make use of charts and diagrams to make it more understandable.” (Student comment)

The analysis of the second question, “During your presentation, what do you pay attention to mostly? Why?” revealed three themes such as “Being knowledgeable and clear”, “My stance” and “Audience”.

Table 7. Results of Question 2

During your presentation, what do you pay attention to mostly?	Percentages
Being knowledgeable and clear	45%
My stance	31%
Audience	24%

As Table 7 reflects, “Being knowledgeable and clear” is the most frequent theme of the second question with 45%. Therefore, it can be seen that while delivering their presentation, students try to have been prepared for the topic in great detail. The reason for this theme is most probably due to the fact that while delivering their presentations, they feel themselves “the teacher” of the session as they are active presenters of the day and were allocated with lots of time to get prepared for their presentation day; therefore, most students expect themselves to be seen as “the authority” of the topic and clear in their presentations. The sample quotations are given below:

“The most important thing is to be clear during the presentation.” (Student comment)

“You should get prepared for the message you want to give and read a lot about the topic.” (Student comment)

“My stance” and “Audience” are the other frequent themes with 31% and 24%, accordingly. Hence, it can be claimed that students prefer to be seen as confident and they consider responses of their audience. Some quotations are as follows:

“Eye-contact, self-confidence and having a loud and serious voice is important.” (Student comment)

“I try to stay calm as much as possible and think that I’m the person who is the expert on the subject.” (Student comment)

“If the audience is interested in what I’m presenting, it’s ok.” (Student comment)

“Audience. Having interaction with the audience makes my presentation better.” (Student comment)

The last question was “What is the biggest contribution of such presentations to you?” The question yielded three themes such as “Self-confidence”, “command of language” and “Career”.

Table 8. Results of Question 3

What is the biggest contribution of such presentations to you?	Percentages
Self-confidence	38%
Command of language	35%
Career	27%

First theme was related to “Self-confidence” with 38%. These students believed that such kind of experience would help them feel more confident and overcome foreign language speaking anxiety. As they are prospective teachers of English, they may think that the primary quality they should have

is to have self confidence in foreign language speaking environment. The following are some quotations from the participants:

“With each presentation, my fear of talking in front of a crowd decreases.” (Student comment)

“Presentations help me to have more self-confidence.” (Student comment)

Another theme was “command of language” with 35%. It can be seen that students think oral presentations improve their language skills and lead to their language development in a second language. Some of the quotations are as follows:

“It helps me to have better pronunciation and improves my speaking and listening skills as you have to listen to the audience as well.” (Student comment)

“It’s a great experience for me to speak fluently with a better pronunciation.” (Student comment)

The last theme of the third question was “Career” with 27%. As prospective teachers of English, students believed that oral presentations would contribute to their future career:

“They prepare us for our career.” (Student comment)

“I’ll be a teacher in the future and it is a great feedback for me to see what I ‘m capable of.” (Student comment)

4. Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

Even in ELT classroom environment, teachers should bear in mind that oral production is a likely stressful situation for some students, and as Horwitz (2001) suggests “tension and discomfort related to language learning call for the attention of the language teaching profession”. Therefore, when students suffer from foreign language speaking anxiety, teachers should observe and identify them and make interventions to help them overcome this anxiety.

From first years to fourth years, students frequently implied that they pay attention to the correctness of the language they use, importance of their pronunciation and being knowledgeable on the topic, all of which may stem from fear of making mistakes. Therefore, the researchers propose the following suggestions: First, as these students are ELT students and they are prospective teachers of English, they should not only understand that speaking is as important as other skills but also be active and voice their thoughts as much as possible in the class. Such kind of a ground can be enabled via presentations because most students talked about its contribution to their self-confidence and command of language. Student talk should be increased in the classroom, which can be achieved through project work and task based activities because they provide students with lots of opportunities to use language meaningfully in a non-threatening environment without fear of making mistakes. Such kind of focus on meaning activities helps students to move from declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge, through which smooth of their performance can be improved and proceduralized. Second, providing a supportive and friendly classroom atmosphere is crucial. Teachers should make students realize that errors are natural; they will all go through the interlanguage process and make mistakes which indicate progress. Therefore, instead of using negative evidence in the classroom, teachers should make use of positive evidence, which means that they shouldn’t frequently interrupt students’ speech to give explicit correction; instead, they can provide the desired input and so expose their students to the possibilities of the language.

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