

‘Break the Silence’: A Tool in Enhancing English Presentation Skills among Second Language Learners

**Nur Ashiquin C. Alih^{1*}, Nabila Eizati Komarudin², Siti Syairah Fakhruddin³,
Shabina Kumari Subramaniam⁴, Anealka Aziz Hussin⁵**

^{1, 2, 3, 4 & 5} Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA

¹ ashiquin@uitm.edu.my

² nabilaizati@uitm.edu.my

³ syairahfakhruddin@uitm.edu.my

⁴ shabina@uitm.edu.my

⁵ anealka@uitm.edu.my

**Corresponding author*

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Abstract

Proficiency in delivering oral presentations is one of the most crucial skills students are expected to develop throughout their educational journey. However, previous research has shown that oral presentation tasks are typically difficult for second language learners to complete. Some of the many reasons for this difficulty experienced by learners during oral presentations were forgetting what to say, and not being confident talking in public. Hence, ‘Break the Silence’ is an innovation tool developed to assist students in structuring their oral presentation, specifically in informative speech. It offers a distinct advantage through presentation phrases tailored to specific topics useful for structuring students’ thoughts in oral presentation. This study aims to i) explore students’ perceptions regarding the usability of ‘Break the Silence’ as a learning tool; and ii) investigate students’ perceptions on the influence of ‘Break the Silence’ to enhance their oral presentation. 12 students from Universiti Teknologi MARA were chosen to try the ‘Break the Silence’ tool and share their experiences from using it. Findings revealed that students demonstrated a positive outlook on the usage of ‘Break the Silence’ as a learning tool. With its interactive features, the tool is easy to be used and navigation is not an issue for students. The study also discovered that the tool has managed to assist students in structuring their presentation and boost their confidence in speaking. It is envisioned that the ‘Break the Silence’ will continue to provide support to students in delivering an effective oral presentation.

Keywords: *oral presentation; communication; innovation tool; second language learners; English language*

Introduction

Mastering effective communication skills is important as it has huge significance in personal, professional and social interactions. When individuals possess strong communication skills, they will be able to express information, ideas and thoughts clearly and completely. This is fundamental in the communication process that prioritises comprehension of the messages delivered, reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation of the messages. Oral presentation is a form of spoken communication that requires speakers’ ability and creativity to express their ideas and knowledge (Oudeh, 2021). The speaker can perform the task in numerous contexts including academic and professional settings. However, the key components of the mission usually include preparation of accurate content and successful delivery of the presentation. Generally, the common purpose of the oral presentation is most likely to inform, persuade, or entertain the audience through words, physical

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delivery and visual or audio aids (Tucker et al., 2019). Tareen, Haand and Muhammadi (2023) stated that oral presentation is a preferred choice of educators of higher learning institutions to offer students the opportunity to enhance their speaking skills.

In this 21st century, one of the abilities that students must develop over their academic years is the capacity to give oral presentations (Aziz, Wan Mohamed & Mohammad Nor, 2022). For this reason, oral presentation has become a vital element of assessment in higher learning institutions. Indriyani, Jasmienti and Fendi (2024) stated that participating in oral presentations can be a source of motivation for students to improve their skills as they can observe the effort that they put in for successful presentations. Other than improving learners' skills to communicate ideas clearly and effectively, the assessment method is expected to build confidence and provide valuable experience that will help them stand out in their working life. According to Razawi, Zulkornain and Razlan (2019), this common assessment, particularly in ESL/EFL programs at higher learning institutions, offers countless benefits in preparing learners for a real work environment. Furthermore, Hanifa, and Yusra (2018) emphasised that a key factor to attain success in the current era is becoming a skilled communicator during presentations. Simply put, acquiring good presentation skills means acquiring good communication skills which can be referred to as 21st century skills. Hence, oral presentation must become an element looked forward by learners as it not only facilitates academic experiences but also assists them in becoming effective and confident communicators.

Though mastering effective oral presentation skills promotes impactful communication, personal and professional growth, studies revealed that students face difficulties to orally present well (Tareen, Haand & Muhammadi, 2023; Razawi, Zulkornain & Razlan, 2019). Tareen, Haand, and Muhammadi (2023) pointed out that students become anxious when they are assigned to present orally to the audience because they do not perceive the task as easy. Additionally, the study also highlighted that one critical issue that has become higher learning institutions' concern is having graduates with impressive results but remain less proficient in presenting orally in English. Lack of oral presentation skill can affect graduates' performance when they present ideas in professional environments. It will be challenging to collaborate with others and lead projects as well. As a result, due to their incapability, they might face limited opportunities for career growth. In addition, Razawi, Zulkornain, and Razlan (2019) highlighted apprehension, fear of public speaking, and negative perceptions on oral presentations as the factors that hinder students from performing oral presentations skillfully. The consequences would be students becoming doubtful of their abilities and continuing to struggle in performing oral communication tasks.

Calculative effort has been put forth by previous researchers on studies exploring strategies to improve presentation skills (Mahdi, 2022; Lisnawati, 2021; Hanifa & Yusra, 2018). It was agreed that mainly mastering the contents of the presentation was the key factor of success (Hanifa & Yusra, 2018). Next, the study recommended speakers to practice presenting frequently as it not only helped them to identify their

weaknesses but also to boost their confidence and improve body language. Moreover, the feedback received after practice was found to be effective in improving their presentation overall. A study by Lisnawati (2021) highlighted the importance of multimedia use to facilitate students' speaking practices. Teachers were recommended to employ various multimedia as appropriate learning resources for speaking activities. Though the primary goal of incorporating multimedia was to enhance students' communicative ability, it also offered more flexibility and creativity in teaching and learning in general. Similarly, the study by Mahdi (2022) revealed positive findings related to incorporation of multimedia in facilitating learning. The findings showed that the practice of multimedia approach improved speaking fluency skills among students. While these findings highlighted the necessity of using multimedia in facilitating learning, there is a noticeable lack of research focusing on innovating suitable multimedia tools that can assist students in improving their oral presentation skills.

Therefore, the 'Break the Silence' is developed to address the above mentioned. It is an interactive tool with user-friendly features to provide fun experience to students in doing their oral presentations. This innovative tool aimed at enhancing students' oral presentation skills by providing presentation structures and prompts in the form of useful phrases tailored to specific topics for students to choose from. Hence, this study aimed to investigate how the 'Break the Silence' tool can enhance English presentation skills among second language learners. Thus, the research objectives of this study are to:

- i) explore students' perceptions regarding the usability of 'Break the Silence' as a learning tool; and
- ii) investigate students' perceptions on the influence of 'Break the Silence' to enhance their oral presentation.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative research design to explore learners' perceptions and experiences of using 'Break the Silence' tool. The ADDIE model was applied in this study as it was suitable to construct the oral presentation tool (Segara, Yana & Febianti, 2018). There are five stages in this model which are Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation. In the 'Analysis' phase, learners' struggles to perform oral presentation were identified. After identifying the common challenges, the 'Design' phase was conducted. In the 'Design' phase, the key factors in oral delivery were determined. By considering the challenges found in the 'Analysis' phase, in the 'Design' phase, suitable words and phrases as parameters to enhance oral communication were given focus in designing the tool. Next, in the 'Development' phase, all researchers of this study convened to revise the tool with knowledge possessed and recommendation from experts. In the 'Implementation' phase, the trial of the tool was carried out among selected learners. Finally, in the 'Evaluation' phase, the effectiveness of the tool was assessed. This included observing learners' oral presentation performance while using the tool as well as interviewing them to obtain insights to improve the tool.

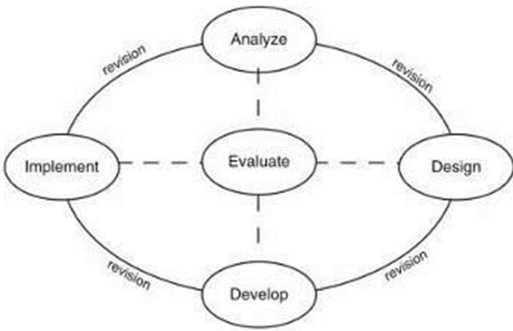


Figure 1: The ADDIE Model (Adapted from Branch, 2009)

Applying convenient sampling, 12 students were chosen from different faculties from Universiti Teknologi MARA to try the tool and elicit their experiences from using the tool. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 20 years old and included an equal number of male and female learners. Informed consent was obtained from all participants on their voluntary participation.

The ‘Break the Silence’ tool is a PowerPoint slide consisting of specific themes and topics suitable for an informative speech together with relevant words phrases that can be adopted by speakers in their delivery. Figure 2 shows the components of informative speech contained in the tool:

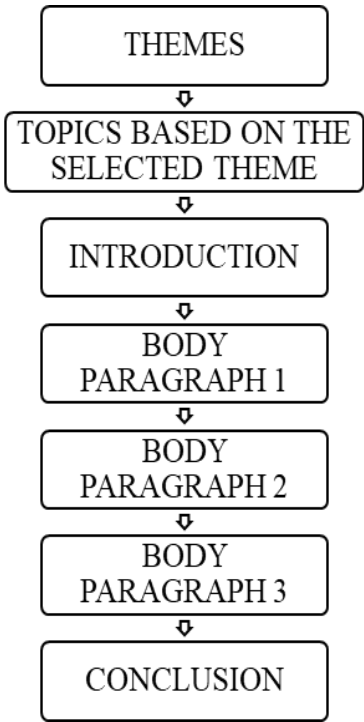


Figure 2: Components of an Informative Speech

The following Table 1 shows the distribution of items under each theme.

Table 1: Distribution of Items for each Theme

No.	Theme(s)	No of Topics	No of item(s) for introduc- tion	No of item(s) for each body paragraph	No of item(s) for conclusion
1.	Person	4	4	4	4
2.	Health	4	4	4	4
3.	Global Issues	4	4	4	4
4.	Celebration	4	4	4	4
5.	Sports	4	4	4	4
6.	Technology	4	4	4	4
7.	Cosmetics	4	4	4	4
8.	Vacation	4	4	4	4
9.	Games	4	4	4	4
10.	Fashion	4	4	4	4

The tool consists of 10 different themes, suitable to the students' proficiency level (intermediate level), with each theme consisting of four different topics that participants can choose from (as shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4).

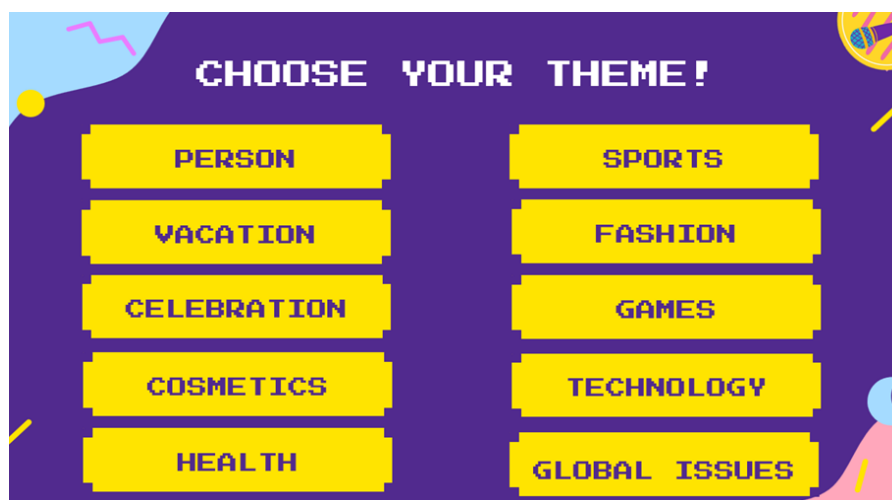


Figure 3: Themes in 'Break the Silence' tool

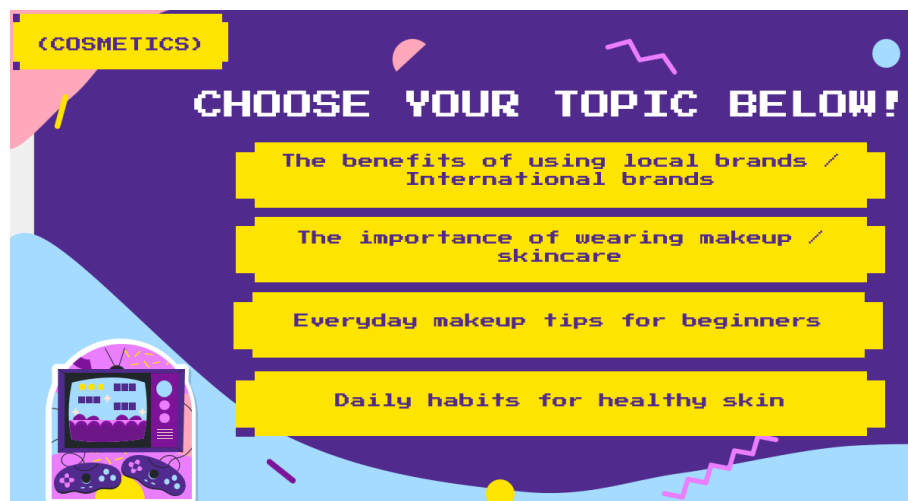


Figure 4: Topics for the theme ‘Cosmetics’ in ‘Break the Silence’ tool

During the data collection process, the students tried out the tool with close observation from their lecturers who assumed the role of the researchers in this study. The researchers first demonstrated to the participants using the ‘Break the Silence’ tool. Then, the respondents were instructed to do an oral presentation using the tool developed.

After the completion of each presentation by the students, a semi-structured interview was undertaken to elicit their experiences in using the tool. The seven main questions asked during the interview were:

1. Do you think the ‘Break the Silence’ tool improved your speaking skills? If yes, in what way did the tool help you?
2. How would you describe your overall experience using the ‘Break the Silence’ tool? (Engaging? Enjoyable?)
3. Was the tool easy to navigate and use? Why or why not?
4. What did you like most about using the tool?
5. Do you have any suggestions on how the tool could be improved?
6. Would you continue using this tool in the future? Why or why not?
7. Would you recommend this tool to other students? Why or why not?

These questions were asked to participants to know more about their feelings and attitudes after using the tool as well as their suggestions to improve the tool for future use.

The final phase of the research involved the analysis of students’ interview responses and lecturers’ observational notes. Data gathered from the interviews were transcribed and analysed. The responses were grouped and coded into themes related to the research objectives: 1) perceptions of the usability of the tool and 2) perceptions on the influence of ‘Break the Silence’ to enhance their oral presentation. Additionally,

researchers' observational field notes that captured detailed accounts of the students using the 'Break the Silence' tool which included students' behaviour and responses towards the tool were also analysed.

Findings and Discussions

From the lecturers' observations it was evident that the tool managed to increase students' interest in doing oral presentations. In addition, students were also able to improvise their speech based on the given structures and add more sentences to the body of the presentation.

However, a few suggestions on the improvement of the tool were put forth by the lecturers. Firstly, the prompts provided for each topic have to be specified based on the given topics. This stems from the students' responses that were unrelated to the topics that they have chosen but simply relying on the prompts provided. Hence, if the tool is to be used in the future, prompts provided have to be tailored based on the specific topics. Secondly, topics provided under each theme have to be revised based on the students' proficiency level. Given that most of the respondents were students with an intermediate level of proficiency, some of the topics are challenging for them. For example, topics under the theme of *Global Issues* are challenging for them. This has caused difficulties in doing the oral presentation. The findings corroborate with Krashen's acquisition model (1992) as he argues that the input materials should be interesting and relevant to learners and only if the input is interesting and closely related to the learners will it stimulate their interest in learning. Therefore, no matter the teaching materials or teaching content, interesting and relevant materials should be the concern of teachers (Li et al., 2023).

From the analysis of the interview data, it was discovered that most of the students enjoyed using the tool for various reasons. Students testified that the tool is fun and interactive hence made the students more relaxed when presenting. Additionally, the variety of topics provided as options interested them as most of the topics were relatable and students did not have to come up with their own. However, some of the students also felt the pressure as they were forced to speak and they felt obliged to use the phrases given. Apart from that, students also felt difficulty in connecting their ideas with the prompts provided

Student 2: "I think it is fun because it is interactable, you can interact with the tool as that can help me focus"

Student 3: "I would rather say it helps me to improve my engaging skills and speaking and it helps me to get better in speaking with other people"

Student 4: "I will continue using this because my problem in speaking in English is I don't have any idea what to talk about. So when I look at the topic I think it helps me find what topic I wanna talk"

Student 6: *"It is a little bit pressure I think, because yeah is a random and random and we we need to think more and to think the idea but I think its enjoyable and can improve our communication skill"*

Student 7: *"Probably improve the words given to help students because when, I look at the words given I feel like I was obligated to use the words, but I can't "*

The summary of the findings based on the research objectives can be seen in the following table:

Table 2: Usability and Influence of using the 'Break the Silence' tool

Objective 1: Usability	Objective 2: Influence
Easy to use	Boost confidence in speaking: prompts (phrases) provided
Easy to navigate: features	Organised speech: presentation structures, linkers, connectors,

From the interview data, with regards to the usability of the tool, students testified that the tool is easy to use and navigation is not an issue as well. The features of the tool are not that hard to use which made it easier for them to navigate through the tool while they were presenting.

Student 7: *"Yes, I think it is easy because it has step by step, can follow the words that they give to us"*

Student 9: *"Oh yes, it was easy to use"*

In relation to the second objective on the influence of the tool in enhancing students' speaking skill, the students believed that the tool is helpful to boost their confidence in speaking. This is because the tool provides everything that the students need to include in their speech which is useful as they sometimes tend to forget what to say when they are presenting and the tool helps them to stay on track. Moreover, the presence of the prompts serves as a guide for them to construct their sentences as they present. Students also find the tool helpful as it helped them in organising their speech. The tool provides step by step guidance in doing oral presentation namely introduction, body and conclusion. In addition to that, prompts were also provided for each of the structures. These features helped the students to connect their thoughts and deliver their speech in an organised manner.

Student 1: *"For someone that is introvert, Break the silence tool boost their confidence"*

Student 2: *“I think it is the organization of the topic. You can choose what you want and...the thing that help me the most is the one, the prompt that help me”*

Student 7: *“Yes, I think it is easy because it has step by step, can follow the words that they give to us”.*

Student 4: *“What I like the most is the multiple lines that are used as a guide like there are multiple phrases uses in blanks which are optional to use too”*

The above findings concurred with the discovery from various research. For instance, Mahdi (2022) and Lisnawati (2021) revealed positive findings related to incorporation of multimedia in facilitating learning and educators integrate diverse multimedia resources into speaking activities to enhance students' oral presentation skills. In addition to that, Gilakjani (2012) pointed out in his study that multimedia tool is effective as it allows learners to control the pacing of their presentations by slowing it down or breaking the presentation into segments. Hence, innovating teaching methods by utilising technological tools like multimedia and computers continuously will enable teachers to boost students' enthusiasm for learning (Wu, 2023).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the students perceived the ‘Break the Silence’ tool as highly helpful and effective in enhancing their oral presentation skills. It is envisioned that continuous use of the ‘Break the Silence’ will be able to boost learners' confidence in doing oral presentations. Not only that, this multimedia tool also offers students opportunities to engage with course content in interactive and immersive ways, which can significantly enhance their learning experiences. Moreover, the tool is expected to facilitate learners to maintain coherence while delivering ideas during a speech presentation as it offers learners the opportunity to see the process of constructing proper sentences and putting their ideas in an organised manner. However, there are also discrepancies of the tool that require further improvements to produce a refined version of the tool to further assist students in developing more structured and effective oral presentations. Despite this, the tool is highly recommended as it can assist educators to create more enriching classroom environments that promote interactive and engaging classroom sessions. Hence, the tool has the potential to be adopted by other institutions in the future. With the novelty it offers, ‘Break the Silence’ also opens for collaboration potentials with other researchers to further look into the usability of the tool and explore its potential to be utilised by students with different proficiency level.

Author contributions

Abstract, N.A.; Introduction, S.S., and S.K.; Methodology, S.S., and N.A.; Findings, N.A., and N.E., Formal analysis, N.E., S.K., and S.S., Original draft preparation, N.A., N.E., S.S., and S.K., Review and editing, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2025

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Data availability statement

The contents of this paper which comprised of data analysis and findings from the innovation will be available on the platform of an online journal under Akademi Pengajian Bahasa (APB), Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) which is International Journal of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics (IJMAL).

Conflicts of interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

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