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Stumbling Blocks between Presenter and Audience: A Study on Contributing Factors that Hinder Students to Ace in ESL Oral Presentation

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the main contributing factors that hinder students to ace in ESL oral presentations. It also investigates whether there exists any significant difference between both genders and the correlation between audience behavior and the contributing factors which encompass language, content and delivery. A total of 144 undergraduate students from 3 different faculties, namely Accountancy, Applied Science and Computer and Mathematical Science, participated in the study. The data obtained were analyzed using SPSS software Version 20. The results of the analysis indicate that the main factor contributing to low marks in oral presentations is the students' fluency, followed by sentence structures in oral speeches, and pronunciation. Independent T-test was carried out and the results were compared based on genders. The results reveal that male students received significantly lower marks for "Relevance" and "effectiveness", thus reveals that male students are less effective and less relevant in the assessment. This study also discovers that there exists a moderate relationship between the method of delivery during oral presentation and the audience's behavior.

Key Words: *oral presentation, audience behaviour, contributing factors: language, content and delivery.*

INTRODUCTION

Oral presentation has been accepted as one of the natural methods of practicing English at higher educational institutions and it is crucial in language learning Thornbury (2005) assumed that speaking tasks that have no association to real-life language use "are poor preparation for autonomy". Oral presentation provides opportunity to second language learners to employ their target language in an authentic way. In fact, it is essential for them to use English in order to comprehend the subject matter while communicating and presenting to the audience. Thus, it grants the students an avenue to develop critical thinking skills, linguistic skills as well as communicative skills. If oral communication practices are appropriately conducted during teaching and learning process, the students will be able to work independently to produce effective oral presentation. This type of goal-oriented task can lead to greater level of enthusiasm for the students, as they are capable to realize the outcome of their hard work and perseverance when they become skillful in oral presentation.

Oral presentation is certainly useful to non-native speakers of English not only because of how this activity can be applied to develop their motivation and communicative abilities in the classroom, but also the practicality of the activity to the students in the future, especially when they enter the working world. Researchers have proven that participating in oral presentations at educational level can be beneficial for students' future employment as it acts as a platform for them to boost their communication skills and soft-skills (Živković, 2014). This is principally true when the students engage in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course, where there are higher opportunities for them to participate and practise using English as preparation for their future jobs (Bruce, 2011).

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However, it is undeniable that while communicating orally in English, the learners will frequently encounter varied linguistic problems that hamper their communication skills and eventually affect their speaking proficiency. Finding the factors that hamper second language learners to successfully perform in oral presentation is a paramount task. Therefore, it is critical to study the problems that students encounter during oral communication and the strategies they adopt to cater these obstacles. The outcome of this study can positively contribute to a more effective teaching and learning strategy in English language classrooms. Hence, the research questions are as follows:

RQ1: What are the main contributing factors that hinder students to ace in an ESL oral presentation?

RQ2: Is there any significant difference between male and female students in terms of performance?

RQ3: Is there any correlation between audience behavior and factors involved (language, content and delivery)?

Evidently, the purpose of this study is to determine the main contributing factors that hinder students to ace in an ESL oral presentation. Also, this study would examine if there is any significant difference between male and female respondents in their oral presentation. Finally, the researchers would like to find out if there is any correlation between audience behavior and factors which incorporate language, content and delivery. In relation to this, it is crucial for the researchers to identify the factors that hinder the students to ace in oral presentations and propose measures that can be taken to overcome these barriers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective oral presentation skills boost motivation and confidence among second language learners to improve their personal efficiencies, elevate academic performance and develop professional competence as well as increase employment opportunities. As Thornbury (2005) remarked, oral presentations have been proven to aid the students to improve their English language proficiency. However, the students generally encounter various linguistic problems while giving oral presentation in English that consequently hinder their presentation skills. Ferris &Tagg, (1996) also revealed that in oral presentation classes, one of the primary obstacles encountered by the second language learners is they do not have sufficient opportunities to use English to converse with others during the teaching and learning process.

In addition, the second language learners also experience difficulties in oral presentation particularly in terms of language delinquent. Lack of fluency in English makes most Malaysian university students feel uncomfortable and hesitant when they are required to use English to give their point of views in front of their peers. This is supported by Jordan (1997) who disclosed that one of the major problems faced by second language learners in oral presentations is lack of fluency to give efficient and successful oral presentation in the classrooms.

It evidently shows that if students have difficulty in using English language in oral presentation, they will not be able to present successfully. This will cause second language learners to feel less-confident when they are called to present in front of their peers.

Moreover, the feeling of anxiety also affects the performance of the presenters in delivering their oral presentation. With regards to this, Littewood (1999) claimed that second language learners can easily experience inhibition and anxiety. This explains that the fear of delivering speech with grammatically incorrect structures is one the causes why second language learners are not able to communicate well in English which leads to difficulty while performing their oral

presentation in front of the audience. This is supported by Ur (2000) who explained that students' self-consciousness affects their presentation since they are worried of what others may think about them due to the mistakes they make. This explains why the students feel nervous when they are asked to present orally in front to their classmates.

Moreover, students' fluency also contributes to their success in conveying their ideas or thoughts during oral presentation. Khaghaninejad (2008) asserted that the second language learners who experienced task-based approaches of speaking practices including oral communication in classroom outperformed outstandingly compared to the students who did not experience task-based principles in their speaking classes. Consequently, in the case of speaking proficiency, the students should strengthen their speaking ability by actively contributing in speaking class activities to accomplish fluency of speech in the English language.

Previous research conducted by Khaghaninejad (2008) regarding oral communication performance between genders revealed that male participants had better performance in terms of speaking accuracy, while in terms of fluency, female participants outperformed the male participants. According to Khaghaninejad, studies also showed that fluency affected female students more, while male students were more affected by speaking accuracy.

Apart from that, the relationship between speakers' performance and audience behavior also plays a pivotal role in oral presentation. Suitable use of non-verbal communication approaches such as eye contact and gestures in oral presentation were frequently associated to how prepared the second language learners were for their oral presentation. Speakers who intend to convey messages to the audience should have certain expectations about what the audience know and therefore what could probably be part of the common ground. Expectations about other people's background knowledge can be taken from several sources. One of the significant sources is the interactive dynamics of the communicative circumstances between the speakers and audience.

Krauss and Weinheimer (1966) expressed the idea that the relationship between speakers and audience provides a mutual knowledge that they draw on when conveying their subsequent messages. Previous studies had also been conducted on audience's behaviors assist to reinforce the behavior of speakers which encompass making eye contact (Maloney, Harter, Braukmann, Fixsen, Phillips, & Wolf, 1976), asking questions (Minkin, Braukmann, Minkin, Timbers, Timbers, Fixsen, Phillips, & Wolf, 1976), and making general remarks of approval (Bayes, 1972) as part of conveying actions which give impressions to audience behavior while the speakers are in oral presentation. The complexity of the performance, length and rate of the speaker's presentation is affected by addresses. An audience behavior aids not only discriminative function, but also reinforces function for speakers' performance. Eventually, a study of speakers' delivery and audience behavior would deliver imperative practical information.

The relationship between the presenters' language and audience behavior is also vital since the introductory part of any oral presentation is significantly important. As explained by Nistorescu (2013), the speakers need to establish a well-supported rapport with their audience in the first few minutes of presentation in order to make a presentation successful and captivating to the audience. The researcher also added that at pre-informational transfer stage, the speakers must not make mistakes about elements that are external to the informational content which incorporate voice tone, register and appropriate use of language.

The content of the presentation also provides consequences towards audience behavior. Nistorescu (2013) stated that the speaker's preparedness is the best approach to keep the audience attentive and interested for the rest of the presentation. She added that it incorporates a high quality of communication skill, a convincing informational content and supported by a meaningful knowledge of the subject matter. Moreover, the audience needs to be informed about

the duration of the presentation and the speaker's intention. Subsequently, a comprehensible structure and good level of satisfaction for the audience can be emphasized by two strategies which are by delivering informative knowledge to the audience and exhibiting outstanding communication skills.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This paper is a quantitative study aimed to identify the main factors contributing to a poor-rated oral presentation. The methods used in this study combine descriptive designs and correlational studies. The findings of this study will root from an evaluative form that will provide information on 2 vital parts of this study: 1) the students' performance as perceived by their instructor; and 2) the elements of presentations that contribute to deduction of marks, during the instructor's observation. The selection of these methods was done to befit the purpose of this study, which are to identify the hindrances in presentations and also to spell out factors in a presentation that might influence audience behavior.

Sample/Participants

Purposive sampling was employed in this study to ensure the number of respondents from different groups of samples. This resulted the selection of the 7 participants to be involved in this study. From the 7 participants, observations were done, and 296 samples were observed throughout the data collection process. However, only 144 samples were selected to ensure fair comparison between the nominal groups fixed in this study.

Research Instruments

Research instrument used in this study was an evaluation form, which was generated based on 4 fundamental parts in an ESL oral presentation: Language, Content, Delivery, and Visual. There are 5 items in 'Language' which include structure, pronunciation, stress and intonation, fluency, and appropriateness. 'Content' is divided into adequacy and organization. 'Delivery' consists of voice projection, note independency, articulation, eye contact, and gestures. 'Visual' are evaluated based on relevance, effectiveness, and audience behavior.

Data Collection Procedure

There were 7 participants in this study who had conducted observations on 296 samples. During the observations, the participants of were required to complete a form that was designed to evaluate the performance of each sample of the study. The evaluation forms used provide the information needed for this study.

Data Analysis

The evaluation forms were collected, and the analysis of the data was done using SPSS software version 20. Descriptive analysis was used for the first research question in order to find out items with the highest means. This would provide information on the factors contributing to the poor-rated ESL oral presentations. For the second research question, independent Sample T-Test was used to compare the means between genders group to see whether there is a significant difference between the mean of responses. Next, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Test of Significant was conducted to find out the factors in a presentation that might influence audience behavior.

FINDINGS

Respondents' Background information.

Respondents' background information is presented in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2. Table 4.1 illustrates the distribution of respondents according to gender. 72 male students (50%) and 72 female students (50%) were involved in this study. Table 4.2 shows the distributions of the respondents according to marks for their oral presentation, which was observed in this study. 22 students (15.3%) were graded as excellent, 96 students (66.7%) were rated as good, 22 students (15.3%) were rated as moderate and 3 students (2.1%) were rated as poor.

Table 4.1 Distribution of Respondents According to Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	72	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Female	72	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	144	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.2 Distribution of respondents according to Marks Grouping

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Poor (1-10)	3	2.1	2.1	2.1
	Moderate (11-15)	22	15.3	15.4	17.5
	Good (16-20)	96	66.7	67.1	84.6
	Excellent (21-25)	22	15.3	15.4	100.0
	Total	143	99.3	100.0	
Missing	99	1	.7		
Total		144	100.0		

The main contributing factors that hinder students to ace in an ESL oral presentation.

Table 4.3 illustrates the evaluation criteria during an oral commentary as spelled out by the evaluating committee. A low mean indicates that the student did not score on the specific criterion. As shown in Table 4.3, the item with the lowest mean is "Fluency" (M=2.38, SD=0.678). This is followed by "sentence structure" (M=2.51, SD=0.579), "Stress and intonation" (M=2.60, SD=0.682), "Pronunciation" (M=2.63, SD=0.623)

Table 4.3 Descriptive Statistics: List of items with the Lowest Mean

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sentence structure	144	2.51	.579
Pronunciation	144	2.63	.623
Stress and Intonation	144	2.60	.682
Fluency	144	2.38	.678
Appropriateness	143	2.81	.681

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Adequacy	144	3.01	.642
Organisation	144	3.40	.741
Voice Projection	144	3.36	.772
Note/Text independency	144	2.69	.822
Articulation	144	2.65	.642
Eye Contact	144	3.02	.653
Gestures	144	3.06	.741
Relevance	144	3.37	.764
Effectiveness	144	2.91	.793
Audience Behaviour	144	3.06	.634
Valid N (listwise)	143		

Differences between males and females

Independent T-test was carried out to compare the means between the marks given for Male and Female group. The difference was significant in 2 items, as presented in Table 4.4. The two items were "relevance" and "effectiveness". Table 4.5 illustrates the mean of the marks in "Relevance" and "Effectiveness" for Male and female Groups. Male groups received significantly lower marks for "Relevance" and "effectiveness".

Table 4.4: Independent Samples Test: Comparing Means Between Male and Female

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	ig.	T	df	ig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std.Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Relevance	Equal variances assumed	4.425	037	-2.097	142	038	-.264	.126	-.513	-.015
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.097	38.440	038	-.264	.126	-.513	-.015
Effectiveness	Equal variances assumed	3.915	050	-1.158	42	249	-.153	.132	-.414	.108
	Equal variances not assumed			1.158	39.857	249	-.153	.132	-.414	.108

Table 4.5 Group Statistics: Mean and Std. Deviation "Relevance" and "Effectiveness", According to Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Relevance	Male	72	3.24	.813	.096
	Female	72	3.50	.692	.082
Effectiveness	Male	72	2.83	.839	.099
	Female	72	2.99	.741	.087

Relationship between the 3 main factors (Delivery, Language, and Content) and Audience Behaviour

To determine whether audience behaviour is influenced by delivery, language and content, Pearson correlation test was carried out. Table 4.6 shows correlation between 'Delivery' and 'Audience Behaviour' and the data show that there is a moderate relationship between the two variables (r=0.0554, p-value=0.000). In table 4.7, correlation between 'Language' and 'Audience Behaviour' is presented. The result shows that there is a weak relationship between 'Language' and 'Audience Behaviour' (r=0.412, p-value=0.000). Lastly, table 4.8 displays the result of Pearson correlation test between 'Content' and 'Audience Behaviour'. Pearson correlation results indicate that there is no relationship between 'Content' and 'Audience behaviour' (r=0.152, p-value=0.070)

Table 4.6 Pearson Correlations between "Delivery" and "Audience Behaviour"

		DTOTAL	Audience Behaviour
DTOTAL	Pearson Correlation	1	.554**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	144	144
Audience Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.554**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	144	144

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.7 Pearson Correlations between "Language" and "Audience Behaviour"

		LTOTAL	Audience Behaviour
LTOTAL	Pearson Correlation	1	.412**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	143	143
Audience Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.412**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	143	144

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.8 Pearson Correlations between "Content" and "Audience Behaviour"

		CTOTAL	Audience Behaviour
CTOTAL	Pearson Correlation	1	.152
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.070
	N	144	144
Audience Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.152	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.070	
	N	144	144

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The respondents in this study were 72 male and 72 female diploma students who were assessed in an oral presentation activity. In the presentation, 15.3% was graded as excellent. The majority of the students, consisting of 66.7%, were graded as 'good'. 15.3% were rated as 'moderate' and only 2.1% were rated as 'poor'.

The results of analysis indicate that the main factor contributing to low marks in oral presentations is fluency. This is followed by sentence structure in oral speeches, and pronunciation. Independent T-test was carried out and the results were compared based on genders. The results reveal that male students received significantly lower marks for "Relevance" and "effectiveness". This shows that male students were less effective and less relevant, as evaluated during the assessment.

This study has also intended to find whether the method of delivery, the presenters' language, and the content of the presentation influence the audience behaviour. In this study, 'audience behaviour' was measured by how attentive the audience are during the presentation, i.e whether the audience pay attention, ask questions, make noise, and / or show disinterest. This study has discovered a moderate relationship between the method of delivery and the audience's behaviour. There was also a weak relationship between the presenters' language and Audience Behaviour. This study has also discovered that the content of the presentation gave no effect on the audience behaviour.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of this current study is to discover the main problems faced by students in their ESL oral presentation. The analyses of this study reveal 3 main factors that contribute to low marks in ESL oral presentation: 1) students' fluency, 2) students' sentence structure in during their oral presentation and 3) students' pronunciation. This finding demonstrates that language delinquency is what hinders students from getting higher marks in their oral presentations. Jordan (1997) explained "lack of core frequency" is the main problem that affects students' oral presentation. This is because oral presentations depend a lot on fluent presentation to ensure the ideas are presented smoothly from one point to another.

In terms of differences between gender, the results of independent T-Test show that male students receive significantly lower marks for "Relevance" and "Effectiveness" compared to female students. This finding contradicts the findings by Khaghaninejad (2008) who found that female participants outperformed the male participants in terms of fluency while male participants had a better performance in terms of speaking accuracy. In this current study, however, there is no significant difference in fluency and accuracy between male and female students.

Audience behaviour is influenced differently by some of the elements in an oral presentation. This study has found that 1) there is a moderate relationship between the method of delivery and the audience's behaviour, 2) there is a weak relationship between the presenters' language and Audience Behaviour, and 3) the content of the presentation has no effect on the audience behaviour. In line with this, Nistorescu (2013) suggested the speaker's language, especially the choice of words used during the presentation, may have influence in the audience behavior. She also suggested that the tone of voice as another factor that engage the audience in an oral presentation.

As a conclusion, this study has highlighted that fluency, sentence structure and pronunciations are the 3 main problems in oral presentations. Besides that, it was found that presenters from male students involved in this study were less relevant and effective compared to their female counterparts. This research had also intended to find out whether the presenters' content, language and delivery influence the audience behavior. However, there was no strong relationship found to suggest any of the 3 factors as the contributor to the behavior of audience during an oral presentation.

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