

Video Recordings of Oral Presentations: A Neuroscience Intervention in ESP Instruction

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Abstract: Developments in cognitive neuroscience provide insights into the motivating role of how technology combined with brain processing offers enormous potential for language instruction. This study discusses on how video recordings facilitate learning as well as offer exciting possibilities for meeting the oral presentation needs of undergraduate engineers in an English for Specific Purpose (ESP) classroom. The study aims to investigate the undergraduate engineers' self-reflections and peer reflections of their presentations that were video-recorded using their cell phones as well as their opinions related to the activity of viewing and discussing the video-recorded presentations. The participants of this qualitative case study comprise of ten Manufacturing engineering undergraduates who are limited users of the English language. The research instruments used in this study include 10 video recordings and three types of reflection forms. The foundations for the implementation of this study is based on Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning. Findings indicate that the participants had reflected more on their weaknesses rather than their strengths. The activity had been very meaningful and motivating and has enabled these limited users of the language to be enthusiastic and critically engaged in activities related to oral presentations. The assessment-5 environment has provided them the opportunity to practice oral presentation skills in a low anxiety atmosphere besides developing capacity to monitor the quality of their own work as well as their peers'. They have also been given the autonomy to negotiate new active roles by harnessing the affordances of technology. This study hence stresses on the importance for language instructors to understand neuroscience research implications in language learning as it would be an invaluable asset in 21st Century classrooms.

Key words: Cognitive neuroscience, brain processing, video recordings, oral presentations, reflections

INTRODUCTION

Research literature shows ample evidence that the use of video material in language teaching and learning dates to the early 1980's. Exciting opportunities for using video in language teaching and learning were created with advances in digital technology in 1990's (Vanderplank, 2010). However, video usage at that time was mainly confined to audio-visual viewing in the language classroom. Then, the availability of a variety of media technologies resulted in the increased use of video cameras in lecture halls and other learning environments as users have been able to record audio and video files in a short time (Odhabi and McCaleb, 2011). Today, video usage has morphed into systems that offer unprecedented

immediacy in recorded communication and the learners of today favor uploading videos to classroom or personal webpages.

Additionally, the dawn of modern handheld technology has brought users to environments which are rife of fanciful educational apps, mobile devices, smartphones and tablets thus equipping everyone with the ability to audio and video record. This has also opened new avenues for delivery of educational materials in language classrooms. Besides, a wealth of studies have validated on the use of videos as a powerful learning tool (Calandra *et al.*, 2008; Nikitina, 2010; Greene and Crespi, 2012; Hamilton, 2012; Rossi *et al.*, 2015).

Developments and findings from cognitive neuroscience has provided insights into the motivating

role of videos and on how the video is processed in students' brains to facilitate learning. Zull (2002) emphasizes on the revelations of neuroscience research, one of which is about physical differences in the neuronal networks of every learner's brain thus affirming that instructors can only work with what each of these students bring to the classroom. This implies that instructors play an important role in influencing students' learning by transforming teaching strategies in the classroom. At this juncture, video technology would come to the aid as it will be in tune with the Apps Generation of today who are all out for active and engaging experiences. In line with this, Chliaras states that classrooms for ESP courses need to undergo a rapid transformation into new learning environments that focus on learner-centred instruction. In the context of the current study, the participants of the study who comprise of engineering undergraduates in a technical university are required to be well-equipped with good presentation skills in order to excel in future engineering workplaces. This study thus reports on the above mentioned case study in which the 10 participants utilized their cellphones video recording features to video record their peers' presentations which were then viewed and reflected upon in the classroom.

Hence, this study is mainly intended to investigate the undergraduate engineers' self-reflections and peer reflections of their video-recorded presentations. Besides, the study also aims to gather the undergraduates' opinions related to the activity on viewing and discussing the video recorded presentations.

Literature review: The ability to deliver effective oral presentations is critical to an engineer's career and it is one of the critical outcomes that is in line with the requirements outlined by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology also known as ABET and by the local accreditation body that is the Malaysian Engineering Accreditation Council (EAC). Since, oral presentation is an important workplace communicative event every engineer is required to be proficient in it (Bhattacharyya *et al.*, 2009).

Yet, numerous studies have listed the difficulties that students usually face in oral presentations such as anxiety or fear of speaking (Devi and Shahnaz, 2008; Chuang, 2009; Alwi and Sidhu, 2013) besides, other reasons such as lack of vocabulary (Subasi, 2010), negative evaluations or humiliating feedback and lack of presentation skills such as researching, planning, organizing, practicing and presenting. In relation to this, AlNouh *et al.* (2015) claim that anxiety of speaking is the

root for most of the factors that affect students' oral presentation. Radzuan and Kaur (2011) too pontificate that although oral presentations are an integral component of engineering courses, to most engineering students it seems to be an anxiety-inducing experience.

A study conducted by AlHebaish (2012) on the correlation between general self-confidence and academic achievement of 53 female undergraduates in an oral presentation course in Taibah University, reveals a positive significant correlation between general self-confidence and academic achievement. Thus, the study asserts that instructors need to take the necessary measures to build students' self-confidence in order to develop their achievement in oral performance.

Confining to the importance of developing students' self-confidence, Dollisso and Koundinya (2011) contend that it is imperative for educational institutions to help students develop oral presentation skills by designing various strategies that would maximize improvement. Along these lines, there is abundant literature that claim on the distinctive capabilities of video recordings which also provides learners with unique opportunities to reflect on their experiences in a tangible manner thus allowing for improvements (Guo, 2009). The current study is also an attempt that was strategized by the researcher to enable the 10 participants of the study who have limited language proficiency to work through their oral presentation anxiety and overcome their lack of self-confidence by participating in ungraded presentations which were video-recorded, viewed and self-reflected to enable them to notice and identify themselves their strengths and weaknesses in their performances in terms of verbal and non-verbal language used.

These learners of today who are also known as K-12 students, Apps generation or 'visual generation' have grown up surrounded by a total abundance of images and as such psychological research shows that they think visually and learn via images. Their increased reliance on technology combined with the ability of videos to tap on the verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial and musical/rhythmic intelligences of a person (Gardner, 2000) offers an enormous potential for the use of video-recordings in ESP instruction.

According to Berk (2009) videos have a strong effect on the mind and senses and among the four types of brain waves, namely Delta, Theta, Alpha and Beta, the waves that have particular implications for videos are Alpha and Beta. Alpha waves occur when the learners are in a relaxed state of awareness such as when they are reading, studying or reflecting. On the other hand, Beta waves occur when the mind is fully awake. This happens when

the left hemisphere kicks into action such as when the Net Generation students are in the multitasking mode. Thus, Berk (2009) encourages language instructors to stir up these intelligences and waves in the classrooms to promote learning. Therefore, the verbal and visual components of a video would provide a best fit to the characteristics of the present generation of learners thus inevitably yielding implications for educational practice.

Research on the brains' neuroplasticity as well as neuroimaging scans of students during situations of stress, boredom or frustrations reveal an increased metabolic state where processing is blocked thus deviating from classroom instruction. This is due to the accumulation of stressors that result in the loss of information access to the prefrontal cortex for memory construction and thus new learning is not retained. Further on, Willis maintains that it is important for language instructors to take the initiatives to reduce stress, frustrations and boredom in classrooms by making classroom learning more interesting with the use of technologies like video.

As oral presentations in English are compulsory in most ESP programs and especially in the field of engineering as discussed in this study, it is crucial for language instructors to devise appropriate activities that would facilitate learning as well as meet the needs of the learners. The advent of free video technology software on students' tablets, smartphones and cameras, video-sharing tools such as YouTube as well as faster internet speeds and the huge global presence of mobile devices which are able to capture good-quality moving image have given rise to the dramatic use of videos thus enabling students to video-record activities and then discuss, reflect, critically analyze and provide meaningful feedback to each other. Videos provide language learners with a unique opportunity to observe interaction in an authentic context besides being a tool for analyzing and correcting learners' errors by video-recording them and by performing self-peer-or teacher corrections.

As pointed out by Askew and Lodge (2000), the last three decades have brought a seismic shift in the provision of feedback. This is because traditionally feedback was presented by the teacher to the learners who were passive recipients or even bystanders. But today, there is widespread recognition on the role of students to reflect on their own performance, hence portraying a more direct and active role in providing feedback. Contemporary research too highlights that learner engagement in the interchange of feedback leads to excellence in learning. Besides, Jaques (2000) adds that the attribute of giving and getting feedback is prized by employers. Fukkink *et al.* (2011) echoes on the

uniqueness of video feedback as it allows the participants to look at themselves 'from a distance' thus enabling them to obtain a realistic view of their own skills.

Studies on video-recordings of oral presentations and learners' self-feedback, peer-feedback or reflections based on the video-recordings have been implemented in various educational contexts and the benefits of video in teaching and learning are numerous. Barry (2012) conducted a study on the students of 1st year business degree program in Australia to determine if the self-assessment method was a positive experience for the students in gaining insights into the quality of their group presentations which were video-recorded. The findings of the study revealed that watching the video of their group presentation was an effective method of feedback and could improve both group and individual performance. The participants of this study had expressed that this experience would be very beneficial for their future group presentations.

Jordan's study on the use of video for peer feedback and reflection in teacher education reveals that the teacher educators who had participated in the activity had benefitted fully and were engaged at great lengths with dialogues that enabled the making of personal meanings although at the beginning they portrayed lack of enthusiasm and were reluctant to be video-recorded. In the engineering context, Abdullah explored on the impact of two self-assessment tools, namely video-recording and self-reflection papers on undergraduate engineers' communicative (verbal) and paralinguistic (non-verbal) performance in a course on communication and presentation skills at Cairo University of Engineering. The results of the study indicate that although self-assessment techniques had empowered the learners by motivating, engaging and improving their performance, the inclusion of external sources of feedback is necessary to enrich self-assessment. Video recording has been found to be a highly effective assessment tool in enhancing performance.

In another case study conducted by Gromik (2012), nine participants at a Japanese national university produced a weekly video production on a teacher selected topic using the video recording feature on their cell phones. The participants of the study believed that the cell phone video recording feature was a useful activity as the video performances indicated that the students were able to increase the number of words they spoke in their monologues. The 10 participants of the current study too employed their cellphones to video-record their peers' oral presentations in their Technical English classrooms.

Yamkate and Intratat (2012) conducted a study to develop the oral presentation skills of 19 fourth years

undergraduate students in a university in Thailand by enabling the participants to self-evaluate their presentations as well as to draw their attention to the strengths and weaknesses of their video-taped performances. The results of the study indicate that the video recordings together with some teachers' support facilitated the development of the students' oral presentation skills as they were able to detect their weak points as well as learn about the strengths of good presenters.

The present study is slightly different from Yamkate and Intratat (2012)'s study in terms of participants who were not final year students with intermediate language proficiency but rather 2nd year students with limited language proficiency. Besides, the participants did not self-evaluate their presentations as in Yamkate and Intratat's study but only self-reflected and discussed on their own as well as their peers' presentations which were video-recorded using cell-phones. The researcher's intention for getting the participants to write self-reflections rather than to self-evaluate their performances is to enable these learners of limited language proficiency to be immersed in a non-threatening environment.

The Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2001) represents a foundation for the implementation of this study which employs cell phone video recording feature as a tool to improve oral presentations. In planning classroom instruction using cell phone video recording feature, the researcher utilized the following assumptions proposed by Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning:

- Information is processed using two separate channels that are auditory and visual
- Each channel has limited capacity
- Learning is an active process of filtering, selecting, organizing and integrating information based on prior knowledge

Mayer (2001) advocates that although viewing the video appears to be passive, it actually involves high cognitive activity that is necessary for active learning. Mayer mentions that several elements like content, contexts, multiple intelligences, multiple modes for content delivery and emotional appeal are crucial elements for engaging students as active learners.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Taking a qualitative approach, this case study retrieved information on the undergraduates'

reflections based on their oral presentations that were video-recorded using their cell phones. Besides, their opinions on the activities related to video-recorded presentations were retrieved. As for the sample selection, purposive sampling was used and it involved a total of 10 2nd year engineering undergraduates from the faculty of manufacturing engineering in a technical university in Malaysia. The participants are takers of a course on Technical English. Technical English is a subject which is content-based in nature which aims to prepare students for the mechanics of writing the different genres reports with emphasis on the project report as well as the presentation of the project report. The student-centered learning approach is employed throughout the teaching and learning of this course.

Neuro-science intervention in this study includes the transfer of neuro-scientific ideas and in this sense, knowing the workings of the brain has enabled the researchers to employ techniques associated with brain-based learning in designing the learning environment. In using video recordings to reflect on oral presentations, the researchers adhered to three instructional techniques associated with brain-based learning that encompass 'orchestrated immersion' 'relaxed alertness' and 'active processing'. The first instructional technique that is 'orchestrated immersion' refers to the learning environment designed by the researchers that fully immersed the participants in learning experiences whereby they were given the opportunity to video-record presentations using cell phones besides presenting orally as well as reflecting and reviewing on the presentations.

The second technique that was employed include 'relaxed alertness' whereby efforts were taken to eliminate the participants' anxieties while maintaining a highly challenging environment. Collaborative learning activities and assessment-free presentations provided the participants with an emotionally supportive environment so as to enable the processing of information into long term storage. The final technique include 'active processing' whereby the learners were required to consolidate and internalize information by actively processing it. While reflecting and reviewing on the video-recorded presentations they were involved in filtering, selecting, organizing and integrating information, thus building connections to their knowledge in the long term memory.

The participants of the study were selected based on their low achievement in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET). All the 10 participants of this study have obtained only a Band 2 in their past MUET examination which means that they are limited users of the language. The rationale for selecting these participants is to offer

them the opportunity to review, reflect and elicit feedback based on their own video-recorded presentations as well as their peers' in the written form followed by an open discursive peer group situation so as to enable them to deliver oral presentations confidently and effectively in the future. The participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms example S1, S2 to protect their identities as well as to follow ethical standards of reporting in qualitative inquiry.

The research instruments used in the study include 10 video recordings and three reflection forms which were labelled accordingly as Handout 1-3. The first handout is the Self-reflection Form, followed by the second handout that is the Peer Reflection Form. The Peer Reflection Form consists of nine columns that enabled the participants to write their reflections on the video-recorded presentations of their nine peers. The third handout which was labelled as 'Opinion Form' retrieved information on their opinions on the overall activity of video-recording, viewing and discussing the presentations.

They were briefed on the important parameters that were needed to be taken into consideration in the writing of the reflections. This include strengths and weaknesses in their verbal proficiency in terms of grammar, pronunciation and voice modulation as well as their non-verbal skills or body language that include eye contact, posture and gestures. Besides, they were also required to look into the overall impression of the presentation. Thematic analysis was used to identify the themes that emerged in the reflections and in their opinions. Patterns were identified through data familiarization and data coding until several themes emerged. The themes that emerged are discussed in the following section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants' involvement in the above mentioned activities had provided them with the autonomy to monitor, interact, collaborate and reflect on their learning. Based on their reflections, it was found that several of the participants were able to critically reflect on the strengths and weaknesses in their presentations whereas the others provided short responses in point form. The patterns that emerged from the data related to their self-reflections and peer reflections of their video-recorded oral presentations were categorized into three main themes that include body language, verbal language and confidence.

Body language: The participants' reflections revealed that they had been able to reflect on their body language as well as their peers' in terms of their posture, hand and leg gestures as well as eye contact. They had expressed that

they were not aware of the gestures exhibited and that they must avoid such gestures in future. Their reflections are as exemplified:

I use too many hand gestures and must avoid swinging my hands.....S1
I was only looking at the screen and not the audience. I must avoid this In future.....S4
OMG.....I never realized that I had swayed my legs before starting my presentation.....S6
I rubbed my palms four times because I was nervous.....S3
So shameful.....I stick out my tongue.....stand fixed.....Never walked freely...S4
Shows good eye contact and presentation is interesting, not boring.....S10
Always clutching the hands tightly when he is not able to find suitable vocabulary to express...S7
He is scratching the head too often and not looking at the audience.....S8

Verbal language: The participants indicated that they had difficulty with the use of proper grammar in sentences and poor voice modulation. No one had commented in terms of pronunciation. The following are some of their reflections:

My voice is too soft.....S3
I have problem with grammar and vocabulary..... So my sentences are not complete.....S7
My sentences are incomplete.....I never realized...S10
I swallow my words and talk to myself..... using too many 'erm' and 'aah'...S9
Audience start to make noise because I was reading from the notes.....I think they were bored with me.....S4
He used wrong grammar, e.g., 'thank you to watching' and many more mistakes S2
Very interesting and does not sound boring because his voice is loud and clear. S5
She uses language that is not proper, e.g., 'Good morning to the Madam and the friends'.....'Have 35 person answer our questionnaire'..... 'Many lecturer. And student saying that'.....S1

Confidence: From the participants' reflections, it was noted that they lacked confidence in many aspects. Most of them have stated that they were not speaking but reading from notes as well as glued to their PowerPoints. This implies that they were nervous and lacked confidence. The following are some of their reflections.

I was nervous and have forgotten how to start my presentation.....S1
I am not confident..... Next time I must practice.....S2
I panicked.....That's why got stuck, did not continue for a while.....S10
I am always looking at my notes because I was not sure what to say.....S3
He looks very confident and shows good presentation skills..... Very nice.....S4
Talking to herself..... Not to the audience..... Shows no confidence....S5
Putting the hands in the pocket and looks very nervous.....S7

Next follows the participants' opinions on how they felt about the activity of viewing, reflecting and

discussing the video-recorded presentations. The themes that emerged from their responses in their opinion forms are as follows.

First time experience: Their responses revealed that they never have had a chance to observe their own presentations as well as their peers' before this. They expressed that this activity which they had never experienced in any other course had enabled them to identify the strengths and weaknesses in their presentations. Thus, they have stated that they could overcome the weaknesses and improve on their presentation skills in future. Their opinions are as exemplified below:

This is the first time I observe my own presentation and discuss in the class.

It is very useful to me S10

I never had a chance to video record my friends' presentations or to view and

discuss my own presentations before this. This activity is new. innovative S5

This is my first experience and next time I know how to improve. S8

Meaningful: This activity appears to have been very meaningful to the participants. Their comments indicate that they find the activity to be motivating, enjoyable, challenging and full of fun. It is also clearly evident that it has given them a sense of autonomy as well as satisfaction in the learning as expressed:

I have learnt a lot and now I know what to improve. Very useful. S3

It is very motivating when I know of my good points. As for bad points, I will avoid next time. S2

Thank you for the comments on my grammar mistakes. Learnt a lot. Meaningful. S7

Embarrassing: Although, most of the participants have expressed the novelty of the activity, a minority mentioned that they were embarrassed and felt uncomfortable to view the video recordings of their presentations. But after the discussion and feedback provided, they realized and were reassured that it is worth identifying their weaknesses so as to improve in their future presentations. The followings are the responses that had been articulated:

I am embarrassed to see myself on the video and the mistakes I have done. But it is a good activity. S1

I look weird while presenting. Not my normal self but I am happy to face it. Now I know my weaknesses and I must improve. S4

Shy. Embarrassed but never mind, I am learning and can do better. S5

Participants' reflections and opinions based on the video-recorded oral presentations reveal that the activity

had provided various potential benefits. It has been very meaningful and motivating to them. In their written reflections as well as classroom discussion they expressed that they had learnt a lot especially on the kinds of flaws in their own presentations like the rampant use of fillers, inappropriate vocabulary and expressions, wrong use of grammatical structures, repetitions, lack of confidence, inappropriate body language, etc. It was evident that the participants had reflected more on their weaknesses rather than their strengths.

They also revealed that the activity has caused them to be more confident and motivated in delivering presentations. In sum, these activities had provided them a great opportunity to be enthusiastic and critically engaged in oral presentations although by nature they are limited users of the language. The findings of the current study concur with the findings of the study by Yamkate and Intratrat (2012) which indicated that video recordings together with some teachers' support facilitated the development of learners' oral presentation skills as they were able to detect their weak points as well as learn about the strengths of good presenters. In the present study, the undergraduates' reflections reveal the strengths and weaknesses in their own presentations as well as their peers. Various other studies, e.g., Kirkgoz (2011) reveal that watching video recordings result in a positive influence on subsequent presentation performances as well as helps students to overcome their anxiety. Consistent with the current study, Dorr remarks that video opens up many possibilities for learning by stimulating discussions and providing greater feedback.

Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (2001) represents a foundation for the implementation of this study. Drawing on this theory, the researcher had decided to employ the cell phone video-recording feature as the instructional technology as Mayer indicates that the contiguous presentation of auditory and visual materials as in videos is most effective for novice learners. Besides, Mayer's theory includes that the auditory and visual channels have limited capacity and therefore proposes that the presentation of multimedia content should exclude extraneous and redundant information before and after exposure to multimedia content. Adhering to this theory, the researcher had focused the video-based activity such that it is aligned to the instructional goals. In line with Mayer's proposition about learning as an active process involving cognitive activities in this study the researcher has enabled the participants to be actively involved in cognitive activities that required them to present, video record, reflect and finally integrate the information based on their prior knowledge in the classroom discussion.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the researcher has encouraged learner autonomy by creating opportunities for the participants to negotiate new active roles by harnessing the affordances of the cell phone video recording feature in preparation for oral presentations. The video recording activity in the ESP classroom has proven to support self and peer feedback as well as empower the learners with positive learning experiences. This kind of instruction which is an innovation in teaching and learning enables the learners to be aware of their verbal and non-verbal language and according to Yamkate and Intratat (2012), this would not be possible without the use of video recordings.

This activity has indeed provided the participants with limited language proficiency the opportunity to practice presentation skills as well as reflect on their presentations without any form of assessment. This assessment-free condition has enabled them to practice their skills in a low anxiety atmosphere. This has also enabled them to develop the capacity to monitor the quality of their own work as well as their peers'. In relation to this, Liu and Carless (2006) mention that opportunities to give feedback to and receive it from their fellow students enable the learners to take an active role in the management of their own learning and they are free from anxiety or antipathy which is often associated with peer assessments that result in the award of marks or grades.

Given the rapid evolution of communication technologies, new literacies and changing curriculums and pedagogies in response to the changing societies of today, neuroscience research implications have become an invaluable classroom asset. Thus, the language instructors of today and specifically instructors of ESP as in this study need to be prepared with the knowledge of the workings of the brain so as to follow ongoing research and to apply their findings in the ESP classrooms. Such initiatives by the instructors would enable the ESP learners to acquire the necessary skill sets as in the context of this study where the undergraduate engineers are required to be global presenters of the future. The approach undertaken by the researchers in this study is indeed a step towards a neuroscience intervention in ESP instruction.

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