

THE ROLE OF PLANNING STEP & GROUP WORK IN PROMOTING LEARNERS' ORAL PRESENTATION SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

Presentation skill is the ability to communicate a message effectively and attractively to a group of listeners. To give an effective presentation, the presenter needs to take important preparation steps. Planning is an essential step to prepare for a successful presentation. Making plans together with peers is considered to be more beneficial than doing it individually. This study investigates the role of group work preparation on enhancing presenters' skills, leading to better presenting performances.

Keywords: Oral Presentation, Group Work, Planning, Confidence, Anxiety.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Oral presentation is one of the remarkable aspects of L2 language teaching and learning process. It is significantly crucial to learners of all fields such as education, science, technology and economy. Oral presentation is popularly taken in the classes, meetings, conferences and public areas as it helps produce the language, transmitting information to the listeners. American billionaire Warren Buffett said, "Practice your presentation every day to shorten your path to success." Presentation is an effective communication tool that plays a huge role in success of each individual. In order to achieve a good presentation, many steps are required to be taken into consideration such as how to plan a good presentation, how to meet the audience needs and how to deliver the presentation in an effective way. Of all the above essential steps, planning in preparation is considered the most demanding since this step has the most influence on the final product of an oral presentation. It is not sudden when almost international speaking tests like IELTS, TOEIC or TOEFL allow one or two minutes for candidates to prepare for the oral test. Planning time is said to lead to more fluency in language performances. According to educators, around 50% of mistakes of an oral presentation are made due to the planning stage or lack of planning stage. With the purpose of enhancing the effectiveness of planning time, group work is highly recommended. Group project in preparation for an oral presentation is said to be beneficial as it is strongly believed that the work efficiency of from two or more individuals would be much better than one.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous research projects have been done on oral presentation topic. Producing language orally is a target output of teaching and learning process. In order to investigate the connection between planning time and group work in preparation for an EFL oral production, it is essential to separately distinguish these two issues and the influence of these factors on the final output product. Planning step is typically divided into three stages: "Rehearsal planning, strategic

planning and within-task planning” (Zahra, Ramin, Bahador, 2015). These authors did the research on the effectiveness of planning stages on Iranians L2 learners. “Which type of task planning leads to accuracy in L2 oral production?” is the question raised in this article. The findings were quite surprising as the authors could not find out the differences in accuracy of participants coming from the strategic group and control group; however, language fluency of EFL learners was enhanced when they were in rehearsal and within-task groups.

Another remarkable study on oral presentation is investigated by Morteza & Atefeh (2013). Morteza & Atefeh believed that previous studies were “non-comprehensive” and “nonsystematic”, therefore, with the purpose of filling this gap, this research was conducted. The authors, through the research, expected to examine the influence of planning time and gender on the “accuracy” and “complexity” of the participants in their oral production. The findings of this study were quite opposite to the previous mentioned research by Zahra, Ramin & Bahador (2015). While these authors found no differences in accuracy between their selected groups, it revealed in Morteza & Atefeh research that participants gained improvement in both “accuracy” and “complexity” in the oral performance. The data collection and data analysis result of Morteza & Atefeh also proved that gender had no influence on these terms.

Sharing the same interest in oral presentation, Saeideh & Morteza (2011) did a research on “the effect of pre-task planning on accuracy and complexity of Iranian EFL learners’ oral performance”. Two research questions were raised into carrying out the research. The first question is related to “whether strategic planning has any impact on the accuracy of Iranian EFL learners’ oral production” and the second question intended to address the issue “whether strategic planning has any impact on the complexity of Iranian EFL learners’ oral production”. Forty students were also required to work in groups with planning time and non-planning time. Participants’ accuracy and complexity were observed and measured through test and recording. The methods of the study were approachable. They help to figure out the valuable information for the research. After completing the procedure of collecting data and analyze it, it came out at the end that learners can positively produce more complex language due to the preparation stage of the process. In addition, the findings by Saeideh & Morteza (2011) also supported the above conclusion of Zahra, Ramin, Bahador (2015) that there is no convinced evidence to conclude the accuracy of the participants was affected by the planning time.

In all mentioned planning stages, participants were divided into specific groups. Group work is considered to be beneficial to develop the effectiveness of learners’ oral performances. According to Maria (2016), “cooperative learning” is crucial in helping learners apply the theory into practice. Additionally, it develops the “social competences” which are essential to learners in their daily lives. There is no research question found in the article; however, the main purpose of the study was obvious. It intended to explore “the use of cooperative activities in a language subject to develop students’ social competences at the university”. The findings of the study suggest that group project helps improve “leadership, conflict management & cooperation” (Maria, 2016) and group work, as a result, promotes social interaction among learners.

The role of peer work is also investigated by Masaki (2003). The researcher looked into the aspect that whether EFL learners accomplish positive oral performances during group project or not. The research question is how L2 learners gain achievement in social interaction and in

the language class. Data analyzed from the research mentioned that learners benefit a lot from the activities done in the groups. As stated by the author, group work “shed useful light on students’ contextualization of and orientation to the task”. Learners tend to be more interdependent when they are asked to work together.

On the same objective with Maria (2016) and Masaki (2003), Fazel (2015) studied the strengths as well as drawbacks of group work in students’ oral production. “What are the perceived benefits and weaknesses reported by EFL students after experiencing peer assessment of oral presentation in their course?” is the main question of the research. The research came with the result that there are still different ideas on group project, both positively and negatively; nevertheless, the positive features outweigh the negative ones.

Mu-hsuan Chou (2011) is another researcher who put great interest on “cooperative learning” toward oral performances. The main purpose of the research questions is to investigate how differently the studying approaches influence oral presentation done by groups and individuals and how effective group oral performances enhance the speaking skill of learners. The research findings state that the studying plan of the learners impact positively on the language production in both types: group and individual; however, the oral presentation of the group is said to be more beneficial in promoting the speaking skills of the learners.

Additionally, Truong & Storch (2007) conducted a cooperative research with the similar purpose but more into investigating the real activities taking place in the oral presentation planning step and studying the influences of group learning on students output. The findings of the research show that during the planning time, learners mostly focus on the task content rather than accuracy or linguistic feature of the language. Around 50% of the ideas of the oral presentation were generated in the preparation step. Pre-task group planning, therefore, is proved to be effective in making oral presentations for individuals. Furthermore, mixed proficiency group is said to gain more benefits than groups composed of learners with homogeneous levels of proficiency. Through the study, the researcher has opportunities to entirely observe what learners are exactly doing in the planning time and whether the performances of the participants are affected or not. The study also points out some aspects which have not yet been investigated such as the nature of foreign language, the accuracy, complexity and fluency in oral presentation.

Many studies have been done about oral presentation and group project. According to above studies, oral presentation and group work has close connection together. Effective group work can lead to the success of an oral performance. Some studies state that group work supports learners with better language accuracy while other prove that there is no evidence for the improvement of language accuracy in oral production. Group work in preparation for an oral presentation, moreover, improves the content of the task and the language complexity.

3.0 VIETNAMESE CONTEXT

Vietnam is the country where foreign language teaching and learning movement is currently developing the most rapidly than ever. It is said that English has become an international language and it has been widely spoken all over the world; however, being competent in using this language and being confident to deliver the message in this language is still a long way up. This study is investigated at Ba Ria – Vung Tau University, one of the outstanding universities

in Vietnam where students can enroll in different English courses like English teaching methodology, English for Business Administration, English for Tourism. Oral presentation skills is also a compulsory subject in the university curriculum. A number of learners have struggled in presenting their ideas in English; therefore, investigating pre-task group planning, above all others, helps educators to figure out more efficient approaches for learners.

4.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

After reviewing articles related to group work and oral presentation, 2 research questions are raised in order to clarify my personal concern:

1. How does group planning develop presenters' skills?
2. Are the teachers' participation and instructions in preparation steps essential?

5.0 METHODOLOGY

Qualitative reseach method was employed to figure out the role of planning and group discussion in making a good presentation for presenters. 150 students from the Faculty of foreign languages and social sciences, majoring in English teaching methodolody, English for Business and English for Tourism were invited to participate in the research. The students were intentionally divided into groups which were offered planning time and no planning time. Additionally, they are also required to work under the supervision of the lecturer and without the supervision of the lecturer. They were given a topic for presentation, and asked to work in groups. Observing, note-taking, recording and interviewing methods were applied to measure the effectiveness of the study. The collected data was then synthesized and analyzed before the conclusion was drawn out.

6.0 FINDINGS & SUGGESTIONS

In the groups with planning time provided, most students (73%) feel more excited when they have an opportunity to work with their classmates. They are eager in sharing their opinion with peers and feel free to do that. Planning stage allows them time to discuss the ideas with their friends and organize the presentation in a logical order. The participants said that if the topics are well-prepared, the presentation will be unified, the content of the presentation will be equally divided and arranged in a clear sequence, avoiding confusion. Careful preparation and teamwork in advance will control the presentation time. Presenters will have a better grasp of the topic. In case of any changes, all the presenters already hold the main points therefore they can control the activities properly, making the presentation more rhythmic. In addition, working in groups supports them with the points that are still unclear or vague to the individuals. Collaborate learning also helps participants recognize their strengths and weaknesses. This makes great contribution to individual development. About 60% of the students said that their critical thinking, note-taking skill, organizational skill, leadership skill could be enhanced through group work. Additionally, members can train themselves with collectiveness, self-discipline and a high sense of responsibility as each member must fulfill his or her task or else the result of the whole group will be negatively affected. Other participants (about 18%) share less interest in joining the process as they find it hard to integrate with others or the topic does not provide them with new information or arouse their curiosity. Another reason is that not all group members are willing to cooperate. Some put great effort in

completing the job but some shows the ignorance or less concern about the task. The term 'Glossophobia' - the fear of public speaking is also a cause to the ineffectiveness presentation. This is a very common syndrome and is easily seen in 75% of the world's population. Some learners (around 9%) feel a little nervous at the thought of public speaking, others even feel panic and fear when speaking in front of many people. Therefore, they find ways to avoid presenting in front of the class. When it is impossible to refuse the task, they have erratic expressions such as: trembling hands and feet, weak voice, sweating a lot, etc. Comparing all the advantages and disadvantage, participants find it more beneficial having preparation in groups as this planning stage provide them with a number of benefits, making them more confident to deliver the message as they get to know clearly what should be presented. In order to deal with the problems of unwillingness and fear, teachers should find ways to motivate learners, give them the possible assistance so that they do not feel left-out and believe more in themselves. Teachers can have a private talk to the students before asking them to work together, explaining them the reason why group work is highly recommended. While the students are in the discussion, teachers can observe to see how it works, whether the tasks are equally divided and if all the members involve themselves in the procedure so that there would be timely intervention.

In terms of no planning time groups, participants are in a rush to complete the tasks. Members are given the parts in the presentation, then they go straight to presenting process. About 35% of the participants are into this method as they are strong learners. They possess outstanding critical thinking therefore it does not take time for them to prepare much. They consider it as an opportunity to develop and manifest their intelligence as well as creativity. 65% of the members struggle anxiety as they are not willing to make a presentation. They are not well-prepared enough and the essential information, data or figure for the presentation has not been fully collected. As the result, they cannot perform well in their speech. Some do not deliver the message to the listeners. Some are out of topic. This leads to a mess for the presentation, making the performance illogical and disorganized, affecting the score of the group as a whole. More seriously, some weak participants tend to avoid joining in the up-coming presentations due to the negative presenting experience they had previously. They said that they were not confident to present because they did not have ideas. To solve the problem, discussion, instruction and orientation should be provided beforehand so that they can be well aware of what to be done and what should be prepared to produce a good performance.

With reference to the role of teachers in preparation step, it is noted that most participants (90%) expect to have the assistance and support of the teachers as to give them guidelines and support to fasten the planning time and to give them useful advice about the table content of the presentation. Students can be excellent and creative but somehow they have not yet got enough experience about the field they are presenting or they are not focusing on the main points. The teachers; therefore, are great reinforcement for them, sharing them the shortcut to achieve their goal. However, about 10% of the learners insists that they desire to work on their own. They wish that they could organize their presentation according to their own opinion and they expect to show the listeners and their teacher as well something new, amazing and surprising. They said that they would love to receive the support of the teachers and they are really appreciated for that but real life is waiting for them, help and assistance are not always available so learning to do things without support should be recommended. In connection with

this matter, there should be a choice. If the students can work on their own, they will be given freedom to do that. If support is needed, teachers should be there.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The research indicates that planning and preparation step in groups offers participants a number of benefits. Presenters' ideas will be cultivated. The content of the presentation will be well-organized and enhanced with the support of other group members and the teachers. In addition, students can have chance to explore their strength and weaknesses, learn new skills from peers, such as note-taking skill, organizational skill, leadership skill and also critical thinking from strong learners. All of these offer them confidence to present the topic, to deliver the message to the audiences.

With regard to no planning time groups, it is noted that a small group of participants expects this method of learning because this is a great way to express and challenge themselves. Other students, on the other hand, encounter anxiety when they are not allowed time to discuss or to prepare for the presentation. As a result, fear for presenting occurs and the result would be unfavorably influenced.

Teacher's assistance is also a controversial issue. Students with great ability would love to work on their own as they believe that through self-studying and discussing, they could express and challenge themselves, providing audiences new and surprising information, making a good preparation for their future life. However, a large number of students would love to have the instructions and support from the teachers so that they can be well-prepared before presenting, bringing them more confidence to talk in front of the public.

To sum up, the study comes up with evidences about the benefits of group work planning and preparing for the presentation. Thanks to the findings, teachers can encourage and motivate learners to spend time working with their classmates and having a careful plan for their presentation. This promotes their skills and confidence which are great factors to lead to a successful presentation. In addition, teachers also play a crucial role in giving student advice and orientation in completing the tasks. With the help of teachers, participants can avoid going around the bush, sharing them a shortcut and giving them confidence to deliver the message to the listeners. However, it is not compulsory to have the teacher assist all the time. Students can make their own choice on whether or not they need the teachers together with them during the discussion.

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