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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **Impact of Authentic Videos on Students' Academic Presentation Skills: the Case of TED Talks and International Business Management Students in Ubon Ratchathani University**

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**ABSTRACT**

The teaching and learning of a second language is such a complex educational area that practitioners and teachers must continue to find better ways to help learners acquire the language faster and easier. Academic presentation skills and public speaking remains one of the most challenging areas of language acquisition and expression. This classroom study is designed to examine the impact of authentic videos (TEDTALKS) on students' academic presentation skills. A participatory research approach (PAR) is used, and a group of 34 first-year international business students taking the course EAP is used as the sample for the study. Findings reveal that the introduction of authentic videos to the classroom had a significant influence on students' presentation skills in several areas; introduction, confidence, speech patterns, non-verbal communication, presentation style, and even choice of words; Suggesting that exposing second language learners to authentic content of the target language could greatly contribute to their second language acquisition. This is so because such content bridges a part of the gap created by the limited exposure to the target language being acquired.

**KEYWORDS**

Authentic videos, TED Talks, second language, academic presentations

**ARTICLE INFORMATION**

**ACCEPTED:** 04 July 2022

**PUBLISHED:** 14 July 2022

**DOI:** 10.32996/ijels.2022.4.3.8

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### **1. Introduction**

In a quest to motivate and inspire students to speak out, teachers, educators, and practitioners of English second language learning, bring authentic videos to the English classroom. Since it first sprang into existence in 1984, The technological Education and Design (TED) talk with the main aim to spread ideas worth changing lives to help inspire others has become one of the greatest authentic video sources for English language learners and teachers alike.

While most educators use the content to help enhance students listening skills by creating different interactive and motivating activities based on TED Talks of their choice, little has been done to evaluate the impact of the continuous and constant watching of such videos on learners' presentation skills in terms of; slide content, posture and movement, choice of word, grammatical structure and overall content delivery. Since learning a second language involves many factors that can impact positively or negatively on the learner (El-Omari, 2016), It is important to understand how these factors affect learners to create appropriate interventions during the teaching-learning process to ensure that the negative impact is reduced if not eliminated. While factors such as self-esteem, inhibition, risk-taking, anxiety, empathy, extroversion, introversion, and motivation are arguably among the most important factors affecting English second language learners' ability to master the language (Marudin, Ratnadewi, & Hamsia, 2018), interactive teaching styles led to higher knowledge retention than none interactive method (Costa, Van Rensburg, & Rushton, 2007). Therefore, the use of TED talks in the teaching and Learning of Academic presentations skills provides students the possibility to challenge themselves to identify a problem within their community linked to a talk of their choice which inspired

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them and to plan a ten weeks project on finding a solution for their chosen problem. This provides students the possibility to be active throughout the course as they are required to make a weekly presentation update on their project and receive feedback from both their peers and instructor to help improve their content as well as their presentation skills. The goal of improving students' public speaking and presentation ability is interwoven with the desire to provide a life-changing solution to a wicket social problem facing their local communities. Hence students are motivated to see the course beyond second language learning and consequently create a challenging yet interactive and collaborative atmosphere for the students.

This paper explores the contribution, if any, TED Talk has on students' academic presentation skills improvement. Although flip classrooms provide learners an optimal learning environment, a high degree of professionalism is required of educators choosing to flip their classrooms because flipping requires devotion to personalized feedback, constructive assessment, and creative allocation and optimization of classroom resources aimed at improving classroom management and learners skills (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). It is hoped that TED talks will provide the learner with the much-needed resources for self-practice and a standard benchmark to judge personal performance in the absence of an instructor to give feedback. Furthermore, the project will provide more motivation for students to practice using English as they strive to perfect their final presentation through many trial presentations.

## **2. Literature Review**

Not only does authentic material provide learners with real-life impute, eliminating the redundancies of scripted material (Field, 2002; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005), authentic materials afford students examples of "hesitation, stuttering, false starts, and long, loosely structured sentences". Such examples of natural speech enable students to connect with personal experiences, thereby helping their confidence. Worth noting is the fact that the example provided by TED talks offers students a wide variety of presentation styles, speech patterns, and presentation delivery methods which would otherwise be absent as students will have only their teachers to learn and or practice from. Using extensive listening exposes learners to real-life impute (Renandya & Farrell, 2010). Hence making the learning process much more natural.

The challenge, however, lies in the fact that, like all computer assistant learning (CAL) programs, providing students with additional content won't have the desired effect if the material is not carefully selected to match the students' level (Mo et al., 2015). Additionally, the implementation of such a program requires additional preparation on the part of the teacher; therefore, increasing teaching and workload could have a negative effect on the outcome of CAL programs (Krashen, 1982). Despite these challenges, introducing videos in second language acquisition provides authentic impute, especially in an EFL environment where students have relatively limited access to authentic materials (Bal-Gezegin, 2014). The fear, however, is that by using videos, teachers may lose sight of the educational purpose and hence the impact that they bring to the classroom (Canning-Wilson & Wallace, 2000). Several techniques need, therefore, to be considered by both teachers and learners to ensure the effectiveness of video use in the classroom (Cakir, 2006).

### **2.1 Reasons for TED Talks Introduction in the EAP Classroom**

Second language acquisition is challenging, and the teacher-centered approach has increasingly become less effective and consequently less sort by both educators and learners. The Students who take the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course at the Faculty of Management Science UBU are First-year international Business students who have had only one intensive English course in the first semester. It is imperative to note that 90% of these students have had their previous education predominately in Thai (their first language), with the expectation of a few international students and others who studied in international schools or programs. Most of these students are introverts with the firm Thai belief that the teacher is not only right but should not be questioned or challenged. It is, therefore, extremely difficult to change this culture and make students more participative. The EAP course is designed to equip students with the skill necessary for academic Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing. As the university awards degrees in different classifications, students must learn to challenge ideas, think critically, and present those ideas in a clear, precise, and coherent manner if they are to earn the top classification. Given the background of the students and previous learning environment, achieving such requirements has always been a difficult challenge. Based on this background, the teacher adopted an alternative approach to the learning and teaching of EAP in the second semester of the academic year 2018-2019. The course was designed to include a TED Talk as authentic teaching material in each unit. The talk for each unit was selected based on it containing the most important presentation elements related to the chapter being learned. For example, a video was selected based on its explicit use of storytelling as an introduction to a presentation, effective and clear use of signposting language, an appropriate blend of pictures and text in slides, efficient inaction between audience and presenter(s), etc. in some chapters more than one video was used by the instructor to illustrate the concept of presentation skills being taught.

As a project, students were to talk to find an inspirational TED video of their choice and, based on it, identify a problem in their local community and then plan a ten weeks project to solve the identified problem.

**2.2 Research questions**

1. Can the introduction of TED Talks in the EAP Classroom improve students' academic presentation skills?
2. What challenges, if any, are there in introducing TED Talks in the EAP listening and Speaking Classroom?
3. What is the students' perception of Using TED talks to improve their academic presentation skills?

**2.3 Material and design**

A group of 34 first-year international business students taking the course EAP is used as the sample for this study. Data is collected throughout the second semester of the 2018/2019 academic year from December 17, 2018, to April 5, 2019.

Using this approach, the teacher selected several TED talk Videos (see appendix for a complete list of videos used) to use as teaching material for the course. Each chapter was designed, and a video or videos having clear examples of the chapter's objective were carefully selected. Students were first introduced to the lesson's objectives with the expected outcome clearly explained. The video was shown to the students, and based on the objectives, the students were asked to design a rubric for grading each presentation based on the level of success of meeting each objective. A debriefing and explanation of how well the presenter achieved the objective as required were given. Learners were then given a task to prepare and deliver a presentation limited to achieving only the expected outcome for the class. At the end of each learner's presentation, feedback from both the instructor as well as their pairs were given, and areas that needed improvement were highlighted.

The talks selected were focused on helping students improve in areas such as: introducing a presentation, signposting a presentation, transitioning between different parts of a presentation, coherence in a presentation, presentation body language, non-verbal communication during the presentation, repetition, and emphasizing the central message, etc.

Figure 1

<b>Procedure</b>
<b>Introduction to unit objectives and expected outcomes</b>
<b>Projection of selected TED Talk for the unit</b>
<b>Debriefing of the Video</b>
<b>Assigning a task to students</b>
<b>Individual work on the assigned task</b>
<b>Presentation of the assigned task to a group of students</b>
<b>Comments and feedback from the group</b>
<b>Adjustments and corrections based on group feedback</b>
<b>Presentation to the class</b>
<b>Comments and feedback from the entire class and instructor</b>
<b>Correction and final presentation of the task</b>

**3. Methodology**

This study employs a participatory approach (PAR). This approach embodies the involvement and participation of all actors in the process and considers the experience and meaning ascribed by those involved in the experience giving rise to a broader understanding and deeper insights into complex human behavior (Lincoln, 1992; Mason, 2006). To capture the contribution of TED Talks to students' academic presentation skills, a participatory approach is adopted as it provides the researcher an opportunity to live the reality faced by students, therefore, using a single objective reality to produce multiple realities based on subjective experience and circumstance (MacDonald, 2012; Wuest, 1995). Additionally, this approach enhanced the collaboration between the researcher and participants, making the teaching and learning process more relaxing and enjoyable, which was essential for the study. It equally enabled the researcher to observe patterns that emerge during students' presentations.

The sample size of the study included 34 students taking the EAP course for the academic year 2018/2019. Assignments were handed to them in each class, and clear instructions were given on how to complete each task. The procedure can be on figure 1 above. Semi-structured interviews are also used to find out the impact if any, TED Talks had on students in their academic presentation skills. Content analysis was then used to analyze the data because of its flexibility and adaptability. As (Weber, 1990) puts it, "there is no simple right way to do content analysis. Instead, investigators must judge what methods are most appropriate for their substantive problems". In addition, the fact that content analysis can be used to describe trends in communication content (Berelson, 1952) illustrates its suitability for this study.

### **3.1 Challenges in introducing TED talks to the EAP listening and Speaking Classroom**

The question of which TED talk video should be selected for each unit of learning objective was not only challenging but sometimes time-consuming. There were many things to take into consideration. Was the selected Ted talk suitable for the students? Did it meet the intended learning outcome? Did it capture other aspects of the unit, such as grammar, Language structure? Was it void of noise that may distract students from getting the intended objective? All this and many more questions preoccupied the researcher's mind during the process of sorting through the millions of TED talk videos available. In an attempt to mitigate these issues and, most especially, reduce the noise in each given TED talk video, The research provides a guideline for what students are expected to focus on while watching each assigned video. Tasked-based questions were also provided for students to answer after each video. For instance, in a video focusing on teaching or emphasizing signposting, questions such as; what signpost language did the speaker use? In how many different parts did the speaker signpost his or her presentation? Was the signpost clear and easy to understand? Why or why not? If you were asked to signpost the presentation differently, what signposting language would you use? The introduction of these questions and other tasks were aimed at helping the student focus on the desired unit objective and learning outcome to reduce the effect of the noise. As far as solving the problem of a single video not meeting all the unit objectives and desired learning outcomes, more than one video was provided in certain units making sure that all expected learning outcomes of each unit were fully covered. Whilst one cannot say these mitigations completed solved the problems encountered by the researcher in introducing TED talks in this course, they, however, ensure a significant improvement in the achievement of the desired learning outcome.

## **4. Finding**

The finding from the research can be categorized and discourse as follows:

### **4.1 Non-verbal communication:**

To investigate the impact of Ted Talks on the Informal communication of participants, the research employed observation. There were remarkable differences in the presentations that students did before watching any of the videos and those after. After watching several TED talks, students' body language changed remarkably. Students tried to avoid standing in one position during their presentation, reduced the number of times they turned away from the audience in order to read their slides, became more comfortable with positioning their hands, and maintained eye contact. These are learned from the videos watched. Furthermore, responses from students' interviews indicated that they benefited from watching the videos as it provided the possibility of learning from different presenters coupled with the advantage of being able to review a particular skill many times over. As one respondent put it, "TED Talks helped improve my presentation skill because it didn't only provide me the opportunity of learning how professional presentations are made, but also the possibility for me to record myself and to use the talk as a benchmark, just how well I did in a particular skill and how much improvement was needed". The possibility of stopping, pausing and rewinding the video as many times as possible was also of great benefit. One respondent stated that "while I fear asking the teachers to repeat a point I don't understand during lectures because I worry they may be upset, I can play with the video anyway I want without fear of reproach. This gives the ability to understand better". This is in line with those (Basal 2015) who concluded that flip classrooms provide students with the possibility of learning at their own pace.

### **4.2 Speech patterns**

Students' presentations showed related word patterns with the videos watched; their speech became clearer as they watched more of the videos and practiced their presentation skills. Their pronunciation tried to mirror those of the presenters, especially in cases where the presenters were native or native-like English speakers. In general, students were more encouraged to improve their speech patterns since they could practice on their own without fear of embarrassment before trying it in class. Just as (Basal, 2015) puts it, this method increases students' class participation overall. The increased interaction and class participation combined with better pronunciation correlates with the fact that using videos is believed to be efficient since it illustrates visual examples to help develop an understanding (Bal-Gezegin, 2014).

### **4.3 Presentation introduction**

A comparison between students' presentation before and after watching TED talks reveal a significant difference. Not only did students deliver a better introduction to their presentations, but there were significant similarities between students' introductions and the TED talks students watched. Three introductory patterns emerged (humor, storytelling, and questions). Firstly students no longer dive directly into their presentations without trying to connect with their audience first. They started their presentation by establishing a connection by using either question without necessary waiting for answers, telling a story in relation to the topic, or using humor to get the audience ready. In one presentation about "Solving the Impact of human action on plastic pollution", a student began with these questions. "Is there anyone in class with a plastic bag? When last did you refuse to use a plastic bag in the supermarket? Do you drink water in plastic bottles? Do you recycle? If yes, what is recycling? Is it separating trash? If we honestly answer these questions and many more, then we can clearly see that you and I are the greatest pollution promoter. We just blame the big manufacturers in order to free ourselves from being guilty. Therefore in my presentation today, I will not focus much on arguing that we are the cause of plastic pollution but rather on how we can help solve this problem". Based on these

changes in students' ability to introduce presentations, it can therefore be argued that TED talks had a significant positive impact on students' presentation skills.

#### **4.4 Signposting**

Signposting a presentation ensures a smooth transition between points (Miles, 2009). Signposting can be seen as a road map that gives the listeners a direction of not just where the speaker is headed but also of the current location of the speaker, making it easier for the listeners to follow the presentation more effectively. Using TED talks, students learn how to effectively structure their presentations using signposting and signposting language. It provided the opportunity for students to compare different presentations and see how effective signposting made understanding the speaker easier and less stressful. Consequently, students learned and developed different signposting styles and languages depending on their presentation needs.

#### **4.5 Confidence**

This is one of the most significant impacts using TED talks had on the participants. The weeks following the introduction of TED talks in this course witnessed a great surge in participants' confidence. Students who found it difficult to present simple ideas before their friends at the beginning of the course started doing so without fear. In trying to find out what led to this confidence surge, many respondents had a similar answer. As one respondent put it, "I am often afraid to make mistakes. I try my best to get my English grammar, pronunciation, and sentence structure perfect before I speak in public, but because my English is still weak, this takes a lot of time, and sometimes I never get ready at all. However, while watching TED talks, I saw an award-winning presentation by people whose pronunciation, accent, and even grammar were not as good as mine, and yet their presentations were mind-blowing. This made me realize that it is not how good your English is but rather how effective you structure and deliver your ideas that matter. My friends and I, therefore, concluded that you could be good in English and bad in presentation. Hence I stopped focusing much on the English and more on the presentation and ideas I had to share with the audience".

#### **5. Conclusion**

This classroom study aimed to investigate the impact, if any, of authentic videos (TEDTALKS) have on students' academic presentation skills using a participatory research approach (PAR). A group of 34 students studying International Business Management at Ubon Ratchathani University was used as participants in the study. Findings reveal that the introduction of authentic videos to the classroom had a significant influence on students' presentation skills in several areas; introduction, confidence, speech patterns, non-verbal communication, presentation style, and even choice of words. The introduction of TED talks to this course was not without its challenges. First, the teacher had to review many talks and preselect those that fit into the class objectives. This needed more time and necessitated more unpaid hours spent by the teacher in preparing lessons. Also, flipping the class meant more assignments. This required a lot of work as each assignment was tailored to the specific needs of each student requiring the teacher to review and give feedback to students on an individual base. However, the outcome of students' development indicates that such sacrifice was worth it. The class atmosphere was completely transformed. Most passive learners became actively engaged in-class activities and discussions. Students' confidence witnessed a great lift. Their presentation skills improved, and their overall Language also improved as a result. It is also important to note that students' ability to look at things from the bigger picture was also enhanced. Students could now analyze presentation topics from several broader perspectives; this eliminated the narrow-minded approach of looking at an idea from a single point of view. This was evident when students were asked to create a 5 minutes presentation on a single topic. The most interesting part of such a task was the debates, arguments, and counter-arguments of what to include and how to approach the topic which preceded the presentation. To this effect, TED talks had a significant positive impact on the academic presentation skills of 1<sup>st</sup> year BBA students at the Faculty of Management Science, Ubon Ratchathani University. It is worth noting that the major limitations of this study include the use of a single group of students. Due to this fact, there was no control group to provide the possibility of comparison. Moreover, the sample size is relatively too small; hence the finding can't be generalized. This opens up the possibility for future studies to either utilize a bigger sample size, use a test and control group, or both.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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