
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Oral Presentation Skills of Non – English Majored Students at Dong Nai Technology University – Problems and Solutions

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ABSTRACT

Oral presentation skills play an integral role in students' learning and developing their jobs in the future. It supports students in improving their knowledge base and enhancing their ability to speak in public. Therefore, students are given plenty of opportunities to make presentations in English classes at Dong Nai Technology University. However, their presentations are not effective enough because of uncovered reasons. The aim of this study is to find out the difficulties which prevent students from making good presentations. It shows that students usually have problems with their body language, language barriers, time pressure, technical troubles and lack of confidence. The study also suggests some possible solutions for both students and teachers to improve students' presentation skills.

KEYWORDS

Oral presentation skills, non – English majored students, problems, solutions

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1. Introduction

Oral presentation skills are crucial in both personal and professional settings. Effective oral presentations allow students to communicate their ideas clearly and persuasively, enabling them to convey their message in a compelling manner. This is particularly important in the workplace, where good presentation skills can help employees to advance their careers and improve their performance. Additionally, strong presentation skills can enhance one's confidence and self-esteem, as well as their ability to engage with others and build meaningful relationships. Overall, oral presentation skills are a valuable asset that can benefit students in many aspects of their lives. Therefore, I decided to conduct this research about the oral presentation skills of non – English majored students at Dong Nai Technology University to find out the difficulties and suggest some solutions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of oral presentations

According to Donohoe (2020), oral presentation refers to a form of communication in which the speaker uses spoken words to convey information or ideas to an audience. Alshare and Hindi (2004) define an oral presentation as a planned and structured talk that is delivered by a speaker to an audience, typically using slides or other visual aids to support the delivery of information or ideas. It typically involves using audiovisual aids such as slides, images, or videos to support the message. Oral presentations can take many forms, such as lectures, speeches, seminars, debates, panel discussions, or pitches. They are commonly used in academic, professional, and personal settings to share research findings, present business proposals, pitch new products or services, teach a lesson, or entertain an audience (Rosenzweig, 2021). These definitions all share the common elements of a speaker delivering information or ideas to an audience through spoken language in a structured and purposeful manner.

2.2 Definitions of oral presentation skills

In their article, García-Ros (2011) defined oral presentation skills as “the ability to effectively communicate information to an audience through spoken words, visual aids, and body language”. Murillo-Zamorano and Montanero (2018) also supported “the ability to effectively use language, voice, and nonverbal communication to engage and persuade an audience while adapting to the rhetorical situation and responding to audience feedback”. According to Dollisso and Koundinya (2011), oral presentation skills are the ability to communicate effectively with an audience in a structured, clear, and compelling manner while maintaining appropriate eye contact, voice projection, and body language.

Therefore, oral presentation skills refer to the ability to effectively deliver information and ideas through speech to an audience. This involves several key components, including:

- Clarity and coherence: The ability to articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and coherently so that the audience can understand the main message.
- Organization: The presentation should have a clear and logical structure, with a beginning, middle, and end. The speaker should be able to guide the audience through the content smoothly.
- Body language: Nonverbal communication is also important in delivering a successful oral presentation. The speaker should use gestures, facial expressions, and posture to emphasize key points and engage the audience.
- Eye contact: Maintaining eye contact with the audience helps to establish a connection and build trust. It also helps the speaker to gauge the audience's level of engagement and adjust the presentation accordingly.
- Voice and tone: The speaker's voice should be clear, confident, and varied in tone to keep the audience engaged. This includes using emphasis, pauses, and changes in pitch and volume to emphasize key points.
- Visual aids: The use of visual aids such as slides, charts, and graphs can help to reinforce the main points of the presentation and make the information easier to understand.
- Time management: The presentation should be delivered within the allocated time frame without rushing or dragging on too long.

2.3 The importance of oral presentation skills

A study by Živković (2014) found that oral presentation skills are important for students to succeed in both academic and professional contexts. The researchers found that students who were more skilled at oral presentations tended to have higher grades, higher confidence levels, and more success in their future careers. Moreover, Tsang (2017) found that oral presentations can help students develop critical thinking skills, as well as the ability to communicate effectively and persuasively. It was found that students who received training in oral presentation skills showed significant improvements in these areas.

According to Mohdrazzi and Othman (2020), oral presentations can help students develop self-confidence and reduce anxiety. The researchers found that students who participated in a public speaking course reported feeling more confident and less anxious after completing the course. In addition, Brooks and Wilson (2015) also agreed that oral presentations could help students get the additional motivation to learn English. Making presentations in English requires students to use the language in a practical and meaningful way. This can help to improve their language proficiency, which can, in turn, increase their motivation to learn English.

Overall, oral presentation skills are an important skill for students to develop for several reasons.

- Communication: Oral presentations provide an opportunity for students to practice and improve their communication skills. They learn how to express their thoughts and ideas clearly, effectively, and confidently.
- Career readiness: Oral presentation skills are highly valued in the professional world. Employers look for individuals who can communicate effectively, and students who can give successful presentations are more likely to be successful in their careers.
- Academic success: Oral presentations are often a requirement in academic settings, and students who can deliver effective presentations are more likely to excel academically. Presentations help students organize their thoughts, synthesize information, and articulate complex concepts.
- Personal development: Oral presentations can be an excellent tool for personal development. By presenting in front of an audience, students can learn to manage anxiety and overcome fear, build self-confidence, and improve their public speaking skills.
- Motivation: Making presentations in English can give students the opportunity to apply their language skills in a real-world context. This can help to increase their motivation to learn English because they can see the practical value of the language.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research questions

The aim of this study is to enhance non – English majored students’ presentation skills at Dong Nai Technology University. In order to achieve the aim, the study is expected to accomplish the objectives, which are (1) to identify the problems which students have when delivering a presentation and (2) to find out the solutions to those problems. Accordingly, the study is conducted to answer the following questions:

Question 1: What difficulties do students have when giving a presentation?

Question 2: What are solutions to help students improve their presentation skills?

3.2 Participants

The participants included a total of 40 non-English majored students in class B1 who are studying in the third year at Dong Nai Technology University. They were supposed to be at their pre-intermediate level in speaking English. They worked in groups of 5 and took turns giving presentations. After 15 weeks, each group had to finish 10 short presentations.

3.3 Research instruments

- Class observation: the author observed and recorded some short videos of students’ behaviors and attitudes.
- Questionnaire: a survey questionnaire was used for 40 students who took part in the course. The questionnaire was written in both English and Vietnamese. This is an effective method to collect a large amount of data in a short period of time.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Students’ problems

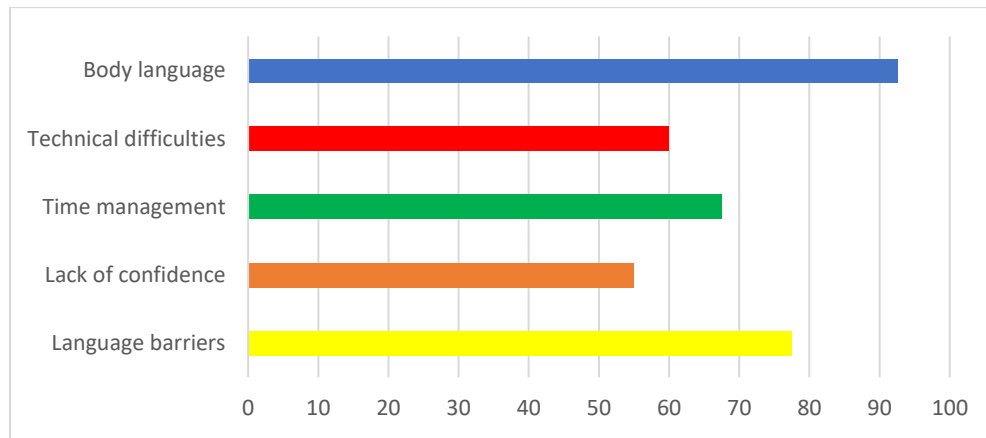


Chart 1: Students’ difficulties when making a presentation

- Language barriers: 77.5% of students have this problem when making a presentation in English. It is a common issue for students who are not native speakers of English, and it can impact their ability to effectively communicate their ideas during presentations. Through observation, the students may experience difficulty in various aspects of presentation delivery, such as pronunciation, vocabulary use, and grammar, which can affect the clarity and coherence of their message. Furthermore, anxiety about speaking in public can exacerbate the language barrier issue, making it even more challenging for non-native English speakers to deliver effective presentations.
- Lack of confidence: 55% of students agree that they always feel less confident when talking in public. They often avoid eye contact with the audience and try to look away or down at their notes, slides, or the ground. Moreover, they speak too softly, rush through the presentation and over-rely on the notes or slides.
- Time management: 67.5% of students do not finish their presentations on time. In addition, poor time management can lead to a rushed presentation, where the presenter may speak too quickly or skip over important information in order to stay within the allotted time.
- Technical difficulties: all students use PowerPoint to support their presentations. However, 60% of students do not use it effectively. Most of them often use a lot of effects and put too many words and pictures on one slide, which causes disorganization and distraction. Moreover, 20% of students have problems with equipment, internet connection, or software can also cause stress and disruption during a presentation.
- Body language: up to 92.5% of students are aware of the importance of body language while making a presentation. However, only 10% can use it effectively, while 42.5% can use it only a little bit. The reason for this is a lack of experience

and preparation. Students who are new to public speaking or have not had much practice may be unsure of how to use body language effectively to enhance their message. When students are unprepared for a presentation, they may feel anxious or stressed, even reading from the notes or slides, which leads to poor body language.

4.2 Solutions

❖ For students

First, students need to improve their English language skills through reading, writing, and speaking practice.

- Reading: Reading books, articles, and news in English can help students improve their vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension skills.
- Writing: Writing in English, such as keeping a journal or writing essays, can help students practice their grammar, sentence structure, and spelling.
- Speaking: Speaking in English with others, whether it is with classmates, tutors, or native speakers, can help students improve their pronunciation, fluency, and confidence.
- Listening: Listening to English podcasts, videos, and music can help students improve their comprehension, vocabulary, and pronunciation.
- Language courses: Taking an English language course or working with a tutor can provide students with structured and personalized instruction to help them improve their language skills.
- Language apps: Using language-learning apps, such as Duolingo or Babbel, can provide students with fun and interactive ways to practice their language skills.
- Language exchange programs: Participating in language exchange programs, where students can practice their English with native speakers while helping them learn their native language, can provide a valuable opportunity to improve language skills and make new connections.

Second, improving confidence when giving presentations can be a gradual process, but here are some tips that students can use to build their confidence.

- Practice and practice: practice the presentation in front of friends, family, or classmates.
- Be well-prepared: Be well-prepared for the presentation by researching the topic thoroughly and organizing your thoughts in a clear and concise way.
- Use positive self-talk: Use positive self-talk to build confidence and focus on strengths rather than weaknesses.
- Visualize success: Visualize yourself giving a successful presentation and receiving positive feedback from your audience. This can help to build your confidence and reduce anxiety.
- Be authentic: Be authentic and true to yourself when giving your presentation. This can help you to feel more confident and comfortable in front of your audience.

Third, time management is crucial in any presentation to ensure that students cover all the important points without running out of time.

- Plan ahead: Plan out the presentation ahead of time, including how long you will spend on each section.
- Practice timing: Practice the presentation several times before delivering it to the audience to ensure that you're not spending too much time on one section and not enough time on another.
- Use a timer: Use a timer to keep track of time during the presentation. This can help students to stay on track and ensure that they don't run out of time.
- Focus on the most important points: Focus on the most important points of the presentation and prioritize them. This will help students to ensure that they cover the most important information within the allotted time.
- Avoid going off on tangents: Stay focused on the topic and avoid going off on tangents that could eat up valuable time.
- Be mindful of the pace: Speak at a pace that is comfortable for the audience. Speaking too quickly or too slowly can cause you to run out of time or lose your audience's attention.

Fourth, students need to learn how to use PowerPoint more effectively.

- Use simple, easy-to-read fonts, and avoid cluttered slides. Focus on one main idea per slide.
- Use visuals: use enough visuals such as images, charts, and graphs to help illustrate your points and make the presentation more engaging.
- Avoid using too much text on the slides. Use bullet points to break up text and make it easier to read.

- Use animations and transitions sparingly: Use animations and transitions to add interest and keep the audience engaged, but be careful not to overdo it.
- Use a consistent design: Use a consistent design throughout the presentation to create a cohesive look and feel. This can help the audience to focus on the message rather than being distracted by different design elements on each slide.
- Test the equipment and software in advance to avoid technical difficulties during the presentation.

Finally, students have to master their body language when making a presentation.

- Before a presentation, they should practice body language in front of a mirror or with a friend. This can help them to become more aware of their movements and expressions.
- To appear more confident and professional, students should stand up straight with their shoulders back, and heads held high to convey confidence and authority.
- Make eye contact with the audience to build rapport and establish a connection.
- Use appropriate gestures to emphasize the message and make it more engaging for the audience. However, be careful not to overuse gestures or use distracting or inappropriate gestures.
- Use facial expressions to convey emotion and emphasize key points. Move around the stage with intention and purpose, which can help students to engage their audience and emphasize key points. If students feel nervous or tense, practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation.

❖ **For teachers**

As a teacher, there are several ways we can help improve the students' presentation skills. Here are some strategies we can use:

- Provide feedback: Provide constructive feedback to students on their presentation skills, highlighting their strengths and areas for improvement. Encourage them to practice and make necessary adjustments.
- Set clear expectations: Clearly communicate your expectations for presentations, including the length, format, and content. Provide guidelines and rubrics for evaluating presentations.
- Model good presentation skills: Model good presentation skills yourself, such as speaking clearly, using effective body language, and engaging the audience.
- Provide resources: Provide students with resources to help them improve their presentation skills, such as presentation templates, examples of good presentations, and videos on presentation techniques.
- Encourage practice: Encourage students to practice their presentation skills with classmates, family members, or friends. Provide opportunities for them to present in front of the class.
- Create a supportive environment: Create a supportive and encouraging classroom environment where students feel comfortable and confident in presenting.
- Offer individual support: Offer individual support to students who may be struggling with their presentation skills. Provide extra practice opportunities and personalized feedback.

❖ **For schools**

Together with teachers, schools play a key role in carrying out effective programs to enhance students' presentation skills. Here are some possible suggestions:

- Incorporate presentation skills into the curriculum: Integrate presentation skills into the curriculum across different subjects so that students have multiple opportunities to practice their presentation skills.
- Offer training and workshops: Offer training and workshops for students to learn and practice presentation skills. Consider bringing in professional trainers or public speaking coaches to work with students.
- Provide technology support: Provide students with access to technology, such as presentation software and audiovisual equipment, to help them develop engaging and visually appealing presentations.
- Encourage collaboration: Encourage students to work collaboratively on presentations, as this can help them develop teamwork and communication skills in addition to presentation skills.
- Celebrate successes: Celebrate students' successes in presentations, such as by showcasing outstanding presentations to the school community or recognizing students with awards or certificates.

5. Conclusion

This study aims at finding the problems non – English majored students at Dong Nai Technology are facing and give solutions. It shows that presentations were not efficient enough because the students did not have good presentation skills. They are confident enough and have problems with using English skills, time management, technical difficulties and body language. Using body language improperly is the most common problem among students. Based on these problems, some possible solutions for both

students and teachers, as well as schools, are suggested in order to enhance students' presentation skills. This study was conducted with a limited number of students. I hope it will be expanded for future research.

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