

Using Design Thinking to Enhance Oral Presentation Instructions in an Advanced Level English Teaching: A Reflective Practice

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Abstract: *This article centers on teaching oral presentation in an advanced level English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classroom as a 21st century essential skill. Recent English language studies about teaching oral presentations indicate a high demand for oral presentation skills in English medium institutions. Learners' ability to conduct oral presentations represents a key requirement for academic and career success. Therefore, educators continue to look for effective, innovative strategies to enhance the learners' oral presentation skills. This article contributes to oral presentation literature by addressing the role of collaborative learning as a strategy that enhances learners' motivation and teaching instructions. To accomplish this purpose, the authors use a framework they developed from Gibbs' concept of reflective practice and insights from design thinking to reflect on their experiences of teaching oral presentations. The paper suggests that teachers can use collaborative strategies and the principles of design thinking to improve academic presentation instructions by focusing instructions on students' personal interests, motivation, and engagement. In practice, the principles of design thinking allow both instructors and learners to diagnose oral presentation challenges, brainstorm and refine solution ideas, and then test these ideas to ensure their effectiveness. By facilitating students' oral presentation projects, instructors can thus identify the learning challenges, engage learners more effectively as contributors to the building of the course design, and collaborate with them to overcome these obstacles.*

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, Design Thinking Principles, Reflective Practice, Synthesized Reflective Framework, Teaching Instructions

Introduction

This paper offers a reflective perspective on teaching oral presentation in an advanced level English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classroom. Oral presentation skills range from learners' ability to communicate in English using basic literacy skills to higher order thinking skills that empower learners to effectively compete in academic discussions and in their professional settings. Oral presentation literature, especially in ESL contexts, tends to prioritize common basic listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, while giving a limited attention to students' higher order skills (Mark, 2019; Namaziandost, Saray, & Esfahani, 2018). These studies suggest, for instance, that English learners find oral communication to be a challenging task, while at the same time, teachers perceive English learners as not taking oral presentation skills seriously. Such challenges require educators to identify and use innovative instructional strategies that allow learners to overcome their learning obstacles.

As Chivers and Shoolbred (2007) have pointed out, students' presentations aim to sharpen their ability to analyze a topic, argue for a cause or persuade an audience to take a certain action, train individuals or groups of people, teach learners, present information to an audience, and assess a situation to determine

the level of achievement of predefined goals. To meet these expectations, students are further expected to use a combination of skills, such as evaluating and gathering relevant facts and using persuasion strategies to communicate a focused message to an audience with clarity and conciseness. Furthermore, performing an oral presentation successfully depends on multiple key principles such as the presenters' ability to engage enthusiastically with the subject matter of the presentation, while at the same time maintaining motivation and interaction with the audience. Therefore, giving an effective oral presentation represents a significant challenge for the English language learners.

To deal with students' presentation challenges, scholars proposed several solutions. One way to resolve the anxiety related to the preparation and delivery of oral presentations is to help students develop a positive mindset. Learners who are aware that oral presentation skills are designed to help them grow professionally may be more motivated to confront the challenges involved in learning the skills (Chivers & Shoolbred, 2007). In addition to highlighting the advantages of oral presentation skills to enhance students' motivation, other scholars have focused on a range of solutions. Some of these solutions include using engaging activities in the content of the presentation to keep the audience engaged, making recommendations for practical applications during the presentation delivery, and focusing presentations on meaning construction rather than simply delivering information to the audience (Pierce, 2021). While Kirkgöz (2020) approaches oral presentation instructions with a problem-solving perspective, the author's interest was to develop a collaborative learning approach in which students worked in groups to identify problems, find solution related information, and propose solutions. To build on the problem-solving perspective, the current reflective paper uses design thinking principles, including phases of discovery, interpretation, ideation, experimentation, and evolution (Gottlieb et al., 2017, p. 21). Thus, to contribute a novel perspective to oral presentation instructions, the authors use Gibbs' (1988) framework to conduct a reflective analysis of their teaching experiences, and then draw on design thinking to contribute to teaching oral presentations in a way that supports both students' learning and teachers' development.

The remainder of the paper is outlined as follows: first, a definition of the concept of reflection is presented to illustrate the instructors' approach to reflective practice. Second, a synthesis of reflective practice is suggested to show how reflective practice and design thinking literature can inform oral presentation instruction in an innovative way. Third, a teaching context is described to demonstrate a need for a new strategy to teach oral presentation in EAP context. Next, a synthesized methodology is proposed by the authors to guide the reflective process. Finally, a descriptive analysis of the oral presentation teaching experiences is presented, followed by a section of recommendations and conclusions as an action plan suggested by the instructors.

Reflection

The concept of reflection has been defined in different ways because many scholars have approached the practice of reflection through diverse perspectives. Anderson (2020) provides a meaningful synthesis of the various schools of thoughts involved in discussions about the concept of reflection. This paper uses Anderson's (2020) definition, which presents reflection as "conscious, experientially informed thought, at times involving aspects of evaluation, criticality, and problem-solving, and leading to insight, increased awareness, and/or new understanding" (p. 480). To further elaborate on this definition, Anderson describes reflection as a well-known strategy for enhancing teachers' professional development and argues that an effective reflection is rooted in the uncertainties emerging from practice. In this paper, the authors use their experiences of teaching oral presentations to identify and understand the challenges English learners face when instructed to prepare and present thoughts and information to diverse audiences. In addition, by critically evaluating classroom teaching experiences, the authors hope to shed light on new understandings and support students' learning by improving the work of teachers (British Council, 2017) and teacher development professionals.

Synthesized Reflective Practice Framework

The challenges English learners face when asked to give oral presentations suggest that implementing innovative teaching strategies could help teachers to better support students' learning. In order to gain insights into teaching oral presentations in an innovative way, this paper uses a framework created by the authors, based on a combination of ideas from Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle and design thinking principles (Gottlieb et al., 2017). First, Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle suggests that the reflective process includes: (a) providing a description of the subject matter of the reflection (oral presentation teaching experiences), (b) describing the instructors' thoughts and feelings about students' reactions to instructions, (c) evaluating the classroom teaching experiences, (d) analyzing the teaching experiences, (e) drawing conclusions, and (f) creating an action plan to refine and improve instructions to resolve the challenges identified. Gibbs' reflective cycle has been successfully used in teacher development initiatives to diagnose instructional challenges and enhance teaching and learning. The reflection process, as described above, reveals that this approach emphasizes teachers' perspectives. Additionally, it is assumed that the outcomes of the reflective practice will be used to improve future learning. This paper builds on Gibbs' reflective approach by extending reflective practice to include individual and collaborative reflections by learners and teachers. As a more complex problem-solving methodology, this approach has prompted us to consider design thinking literature to complement Gibbs' framework.

Design thinking has been used with respect to its emphasis on user experiences, which in this paper refers to advanced English learners' experiences of learning to prepare and give oral presentations. Dunne and Martin (2006) describe design thinking as cognitive processes that designers use, as opposed to the designed objects they produce. In general, the term is viewed as a style of thinking which combines empathy, creativity, and rationality to analyze and tailor solutions to specific contexts. Through using this process, learners have more opportunities to engage in real-world projects that provide valuable practices including preparation for career requirements and development of the skills needed to address real-life problems. Moreover, this approach allows learners to develop the skills of creativity and critical thinking and eventually, it creates a motivating environment for learning. One of the most important aspects of design thinking is the ways it stimulates essential skills, such as collaboration and critical thinking. While this approach encourages learners to focus on finding solutions to real-world problems, it can also be used by teachers to reflect on their teaching strategies and improve instructions. Since design thinking suggests using concrete examples from real life experiences during the learning experiences, this approach can be effective in teaching oral presentation skills.

Design thinking principles—including phases of discovery, interpretation, ideation, experimentation, and evolution (Gottlieb et al., 2017, p. 21) – are used in the current reflective paper to complement Gibbs' (1988) reflective framework. First, design thinking principles strengthen reflection by providing the opportunity for the authors to consider the centrality of both students' needs and teachers' desire to address students' needs by adjusting instructions. The inclusion of design thinking into the reflective process creates two simultaneous learning paths, one for students and another for teachers. For the students, the new framework creates opportunities to reflect on their presentation performances within a collaborative classroom setting, identify potential challenges, create action plans for improvement, and put their action plans into practice during a forthcoming presentation within the same course offering. For teachers, the current framework complements Gibbs' reflective framework by allowing teachers to adapt instructions in order to emphasize (Armstrong, 2016):

- Working on real-world projects or topics.
- Using empathy to develop a deeper understanding of students' needs.
- Synthesizing the learning which instructors gleaned by observing students' reactions to instructions.

- Reflecting on the instructors' thoughts and feelings about students' experiences of learning to give oral presentations.
- Collaboratively crafting problem statements for the students' needs identified (e.g., students need a way to speak more confidently, but they are unsure how to overcome public speaking anxiety).
- Collaboratively brainstorming (or generating) solution ideas to address the needs identified. This phase takes into consideration the reflective analysis, which suggests including insights from the literature (best practices from diverse sources) elicited by the needs identified.
- Discussing and refining the brainstormed solution ideas to generate new solutions that address students' needs. Armstrong (2016) suggests that the new solutions could be a variation of the previous ones or completely new.
- Collaboratively redesigning the instructions (oral presentation module or a lesson plan) to address the identified needs. The module (or lesson plan) created is intended to allow students and instructors to engage with the solutions retained.
- Using refined instructions to facilitate students' next presentations.
- Receiving feedback.
- Iterating the reflective process.

Thus, reflections on the experiences of teaching oral presentations as carried out in this paper follow the reflective framework described above.

Teaching Context

The authors of this reflective paper teach intensive English course to advanced level learners who seek to improve their English proficiency and enhance their chances of success in their university majors and in their professions. The course is taught at the American Language Institute (ALI), which is housed within Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP). Students enrolled in the program come from diverse international backgrounds. Students' countries of origin include - but are not limited to - China, Columbia, Egypt, Japan, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Taiwan. In part, the course aims to help students develop problem-solving and oral presentation skills. While the U.S. context offers various opportunities for the students to use English and develop their oral communication skills, oral presentation instructions remain critical for preparing students to participate in academic discussions.

A Synthesized Approach to Reflective Practice

This section recaps the process of reflection followed in this paper as described in the synthesized framework presented earlier in the article. Our reflective approach could be summed up into the following steps. First, consideration of design thinking allowed the instructor of record to suggest real-life topics from which students could pick one for their presentation projects. Students who preferred choosing their own topics were also instructed to consider real-world situations. After the initial discussions of topic choices with learners, the instructor of record implemented oral presentation instructions and collected reflective thoughts and feelings about the teaching experiences. In this step, it is worth mentioning that the instructor's notes were complemented with inferences from students' emails suggesting their topic preferences. Another criterion borrowed from design thinking during this observation and description phase was to gain empathy with all students and consider the reactions of high and low achieving students to attempt to learn a variety of students' needs. Focusing on both the instructors and students was consistent with design thinking's suggestion to consider all the stakeholders' involvement during the observation phase (Gottlieb et al., 2017).

Throughout the teaching and reflection processes, empathy was used to achieve a deeper understanding of students' learning challenges. Such understanding was needed to implement the next step in which the authors – including the instructor of record and her colleague who also previously taught the class – collaborated to reflect on the teaching notes and synthesize the learning emerging from students' reactions to classroom instructions. The main aim of the collaboration was to identify potential themes emerging from the reflective notes, and then further discuss these themes to identify students' needs, and clearly state specific learning challenges (Gottlieb et al., 2017). After consulting each other, the two instructors held a first meeting to make sense of the reflective notes. The instructors' discussions of students' reactions to the first round of presentations revealed some key challenges that impeded students' performance.

The second collaborative meeting of the instructors was devoted to generating solution ideas to address the identified challenges. One way in which we have used design thinking to complement Gibbs' (1988) approach to reflection at this phase is by stressing collaborative discussions to address learners' needs. Furthermore, this phase takes into consideration the reflective analysis, which suggests including insights from the literature (i.e., best practices from diverse sources) elicited by the needs identified. To brainstorm solution ideas, we used "How might we ..." statements, as suggested by Gottlieb et al. (2017, p. 23). An example of such statements could be: "How might we modify instructions to help students enhance their confidence when they give oral presentations in front of the class?"

The next step focused on refining the solution ideas we brainstormed to address the first identified challenge. The purpose of this step was to reach one or a few solutions applicable to the students' needs emerging from the initial presentations. During this step, our reflective process remained informed by Armstrong's (2016) suggestion that the new solutions could be a variation of the previous ones or completely new. An example of a solution statement could be "Students have the option to choose a topic that they are excited to discuss with the class".

Our next step following the statement of solutions consisted of collaboratively redesigning the instructions. Specifically, our collaboration at this step focused on designing an oral presentation lesson plan to address the identified needs. The purpose of the lesson plan was to allow students and instructors to engage with the solutions retained and improve students' ability to prepare and deliver their presentations on the topics they chose to address.

Next, the instructor of record employed the solution collaboratively retained to facilitate the following round of presentations. In order to maintain the reflective teaching mindset, the instructor of record continued compiling reflective notes, which are to be analyzed to identify learners' challenges, state their needs, collaboratively produce solutions, and implement these solutions to help learners improve their abilities and skills. Following the implementation of solutions, the instructor collects feedback and uses it to implement another cycle of reflections.

Descriptive Analysis of Oral Presentations Teaching Experiences

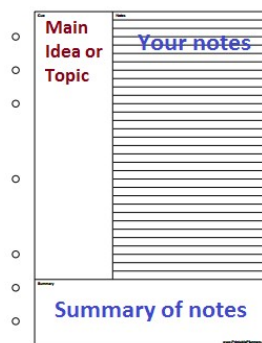
The section discusses the shifts in the instructors' teaching practices which have been informed by learners' experiences and authentic experiential teaching and learning experience. The following analysis stems from the instructors' reflections, collaboration, and observations before, during and after completing this course. This reflection is meant to serve as a tool to improve the quality of the teaching practices. Moreover, this collaborative process takes a user-centered design method. One core principle in design thinking is to ensure the best results, "... the work should be carried out in as realistic (naturalistic) setting as possible and, at the same time, the results should provide an opportunity to turn what is learnt into modifications in the evolving [art] system"(Candy, 2006, p.18).

In this classroom space, instructors learn from the learners' behavior as these learners interact with the new production. Thus, the learners' new work and discoveries inform both their learning practices and the instructors. In this way, a new area of creative practice and a source of knowledge emerge from this collaborative interaction.

As a part of the design of the Advanced Oral Communication course, the instructor of record designed weekly listening activities to allow students to diversify their knowledge about contemporary and global issues. In these activities, learners utilize a variety of vocabulary words in different fields, which is a preliminary requirement for conducting an effective oral presentation. The learners were asked to complete 60 minutes of listening activities per week outside the classroom setting, then provide a weekly oral presentation to discuss their topics. The following process combined three stages of shifts in teaching instructions.

At the first stage, the instructors provided a list of specific potential topics and resources such as podcasts, YouTube (EDU), CNN, NPR, the History Channel, the Discovery Channel, and TED Talk. Students had limited specific lectures to choose from. Another less constricted option was available for bridge students who were already enrolled in a university program and take classes on a regular basis. These students had the option to choose either from the provided list or the live lectures on campus that they attend to fulfill this requirement. In addition, students had to write feedback to reflect on the effectiveness of this strategy in enhancing their oral presentation skills. In addition to the lists and the instructions, students received appropriate instructions and tools to allow them to take notes for the listening activities. In previous classes, during this course they were introduced to Cornell note-taking method and trained to use this method to take notes and organize their notes into effective summaries. The image (Figure 1) below cited from Pellissippi State Community College Libraries (n.d.) shows a sample of Cornell's note-taking format:

Figure 1: Example of a notebook based on Cornell's note-taking strategy



(Image retrieved from: <https://lib.pstcc.edu/esl/listening>)

After using the first set of instructions to conduct the first week's oral presentations, observation notes about students' performance and responses revealed some emerging problems about the selected topics in the initial course design. The instructor of record received a few emails from students asking whether they could choose their own topics, which were not included in the list of topics provided. At this moment, the instructors collaboratively realized the need to include students' preferences instead of imposing a ready selected list form which they could choose. Students' motivation increases if they are involved in the instructional process. Allowing students to choose their own topics was perceived as a source of motivation which would enhance their performance and learning outcomes. This realization prompted the instructors to raise the following question: How can the oral presentation project's guidelines be designed in a flexible way to give more options for learners to choose their own topic? To solve this problem, the

instructors held a meeting to discuss the issue, and they decided to allow students to choose their own topics. Based on students' performance on the first presentations and their email, as well as their feedback, the instructors determined that allowing students to choose their own topics could increase their motivation to engage with their topics and the learning instructions.

In the second step of presentation instructions, most of the students chose their own topics. Most of the topics they selected were related to their future majors and personal interests including their cultural backgrounds. For example, one student was interested in comparative analysis between North American and Asian culture. Another student was interested in how the fashion industry needs to consider producing eco-friendly fashion products. The instructors noticed that most of the students preferred to choose their own selected topics over choosing from the list. In addition, students showed more engagement and motivation to oral presentation when they were given the freedom to choose their own topics. Here, collaboration between the instructors and the learners becomes a key principle for creating a new practice in this classroom space. In this interaction, the instructors learn from the learners' behavior. Thus, the learners' new work and discoveries inform both their learning practices and the instructors. In this way, a new area of creative practice and a source of knowledge emerge from this collaborative interaction. Both the instructors and the learners have collaboratively taken a different process that has emerged from this interaction between the instructors and the learners.

By the fifth week's oral presentation, students' reflective feedback and the instructors' observations revealed two new types of challenges. First, students who showed more enthusiasm were spending more time than allotted for the task. On the other hand, students who did not change their topics were falling into monotonous repetitions of their ideas. Considering this observation as an indication that a new modification of instructions was needed, the instructors held a second collaborative meeting. The discussion centered on answering the following question: How can instructors channel students' motivation and train them to manage time to complete their presentation task effectively? After re-examining the goals of the course, the instructors decided to shift the instructions from individual presentations to small group presentations. The shift considers the importance of students' choice of topics and the need to focus on learning goals. Considering students' preferred topics can motivate them to engage with the presentations. The level of motivation students' show can indicate the level of learning that takes place. A second reason that led instructors to decide to shift instructions to group work presentations was the need to enhance the learners' critical thinking skills which are crucial to success. Many researchers suggest that collaborative interaction is one effective way for learners to develop advanced critical thinking skills, and group work presentation is a micro example for this collaborative interaction. Therefore, the instructors choose to shift instructions to group presentation for three reasons: a) help learners overcome the problem of time management, b) increase learners' level of motivation, and c) develop learners' critical thinking skills through using collaborative interaction.

The new instruction guidelines which the learners received included forming collaborative groups for oral presentation based on learners' motivation and interests. These new teaching instructions were designed this time to overcome the emerging issues regarding the previous individual oral presentations and propose the following questions: how can we sustain motivation among students? How is it possible to save students from falling into repetition and monotony? Finally, what else can be done to help students develop time management skills? Indeed, the instructors have developed these new teaching strategies bearing in mind the importance of establishing a learning experience that advances high critical thinking and organizational skills for the oral presentations to be most effective. This shift to group oral presentations helped students to apply critical thinking to overcome the problems they encountered earlier with motivation and time management by default. Here, the learners needed to work in groups of 3-4 to choose a topic about which all members had a passion. In addition, each group needed to assign specific tasks and consider the new requirement, with each learner participating in the discussion, planning, and

research, and effectively delivering within the group his/her oral presentation. Such collaboration allowed learners to brainstorm, organize and learn from each other in harmony within a sufficient time. Moreover, it allowed students to discuss their opinions and ideas by incorporating what works best for everyone in the group while at the same time maintaining their individual voices. Furthermore, to secure their rights to express their own opinions, the new instructions incorporated, in addition to group collaboration, a one-page reflection description from each student to highlight their personal contribution and perspective on the group presentation. Each group member was asked to submit a unique personal reflection to emphasize the importance of the topic and their opinions along with the rationale behind supporting these opinions. Thus, by creating democratic, collaborative group work experiences, learners were given broader alternatives and possibilities to exercise critical thinking skills while at the same time embracing their opinions and following their individual passion.

Conclusions, Recommendations and Action Plan

The section on teaching experiences has discussed the significant shifts in the instructors' teaching practices that were evolving during an authentic teaching experience for oral presentations. The following part addresses the instructors' conclusions and further suggests recommendations that can be modified by educators who are interested in teaching a similar course that focuses on developing oral presentations competencies. An action plan is also suggested to show how the instructors plan to integrate the learning gained in this project into future oral presentation instructions. Educators and instructors may also consider this action plan and adapt it to their needs when offering oral presentation course instructions.

The instructors' approach to solving the emerging challenges in the oral communication course included synthesizing reflective practices with design thinking principles. With design thinking principles (problem-solving, user-centered design, empathy, and testing), the instructors were able to achieve the following: a) identify the challenges the learners faced during their oral presentation learning experiences, b) engage learners more effectively as contributors to the building of the course design, and c) adjust instructions throughout the learning process to help learners overcome these obstacles collaboratively. While reflecting on this experience of teaching and learning processes, the instructors have concluded that flexibility and different approaches that are based on learners' experiences are crucial for effective oral presentation instructions. They suggest the following key points to take into consideration to develop skills and competencies for oral presentation instructions. First, using collaborative group work as a crucial strategy in oral presentation to allow the development of critical thinking skills enhances motivation and problem-solving skills in students' learning practices. Second, the instructors promote collaboration between them and learners to allow identifying the problems emerging from daily practices through investigating the instructors' own practices. Also, the instructors examine their own practice. In this way, reflective practice serves as an opportunity for the instructors to assess the effectiveness of their teaching processes and test the results in a setting of a real classroom usage. Traditionally, reflective practices were used to gradually modify teaching instructions over time. However, by integrating design thinking principles, improving course instructions becomes instantly present in the instructors' immediate teaching practices. This strategy is flexible enough and centers on granting users their needs and upgrading the teaching instructions and the learning process in an effective manner for both the learners and the instructors. By engaging in this synthesized approach to reflective practice, the instructors can improve their teaching instructions and learners' oral presentation skills. This synthesized method improves reflective practices because instructors and users (learners) are involved in creating, modifying, and disseminating knowledge. The approach promotes collaboration between the instructors of the designed course and the users of the course to identify the problems emerging from the learning process through investigating the instructors' immediate teaching practices.

Action Plan

The instructors suggest the following action plan to consider in the future when teaching an oral presentation course. First, the instructors will repeat the same strategy of individual and collaborative preparation and delivery of oral presentations, so that students can continue to learn collaboratively. Second, they will continue to apply the instructors' reflective process which is based on the synthesized reflective framework. Also, they will maintain the collaborative discussions at the beginning of the semester prior to the beginning of the class and throughout the teaching process. Third, although the instructors have asked learners to provide feedback by reflecting on their learning experiences, the instructors plan to collect information formally for an action research project in which learners and teachers will be interviewed to gain empathy through their voices rather than the analysis of their reflective notes, which will be informally gathered. The instructors can adapt instructions to meet the needs of the learners by integrating design thinking principles into the reflective process. This approach ensures necessary flexibility for the instructors to make instructional changes throughout the scaffolding process when guiding students through a series of presentations from the preparatory stage to the execution of the projects.

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