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Under the Spotlight: Students' Viewpoint of an Oral Presentation Course during Open and Distant Learning (ODL)

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused drastic changes to be made in sustaining teaching and learning where technology-enhanced learning and open and distant learning (ODL) have to be adopted as social and physical contacts are now limited globally to mitigate the transmissions of viruses. At the same time, courses at tertiary level incorporate oral presentation as a common form of assessment. Nevertheless, students' level of performances in oral presentations is still considered unsatisfactory. Contributing factors could be students' presentations relied on content memorisation and lack of confidence in public speaking. Therefore, teaching effective presentation skills is deemed necessary in improving students' oral presentations. This study sought to discover students' expectations and perceptions on the content and delivery of a presentation course in ODL. The study adopted a qualitative approach, where a semi-structured interview was conducted among ten diploma students undertaking a presentation skills course in Universiti Teknologi MARA. The data gathered was descriptively analysed. The findings revealed that the course met the participants' expectations of a presentation course. Participants also claimed to face no difficulties in understanding the course content; although some participants addressed that the course should be more effective in the physical classroom due to technological issues faced. In terms of the content delivery, participants attributed instructor's delivery of content positively, despite technological difficulties faced by several participants. Suggestions that were expressed by participants are procured to bring new insight for educators and policy makers to improve the content and pedagogies of oral presentation courses.
Keywords: Distance Learning, Online Learning, Oral Presentation, Presentation Skills

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has become a global health issue and has had a major impact on education throughout the world. Learning methods were delivered through open and distance learning (ODL) in which the incorporation of technological resources and innovative education strategies has transformed the teaching and learning processes. ODL is mainly defined as the integration of classroom and distance learning to facilitate an independent,

interactive, and collaborative learning among students in whatever courses they undertake. The earlier perception was that education system would be adopting ODL just for a little while, it was not expected that this situation would prolong this far. Thus, ODL is now deemed important and must not be underestimated. Proper guidelines and effective pedagogy approach to tertiary level learners must be investigated in depth for them to achieve the best results possible in the process of ODL.

The need for ODL is even more urgent as the future is still unknown, and hopelessness can build up from time to time. ODLs were done via many different platforms at tertiary level such as Zoom, Google meet, Webex, just to name a few. Communication skills such as oral presentation skill taken by tertiary level learners as a course subject is considered critical and important since skills acquired from the course is a required skill for learners to perform in other subjects. Communication between students can still continue virtually and creativity is not obstructed even without face-to-face presentation. Nevertheless, students' level of performances in oral presentations is still considered unsatisfactory. Therefore, teaching effective presentation skills is deemed necessary in improving students' oral presentations. Developing good speaking and presentation skills, which will be useful in both learners' academic and professional life at tertiary level involves innovative technologies and learning management systems. To this point, incorporating oral presentation as a common form of assessment is definitely significant to continuing the process of education and minimizing the gaps that are going to result as a consequence of the current circumstances.

At the same time, designing a course involves making choices deliberately in terms of content and teaching strategies to achieve certain curricular outcomes, which are determined based on the designers' knowledge on the subject matter, types of learners, resources, and tools available (Goodyear, 2009). As these are heavily influenced by teachers' personal conduct or personality and beliefs about the purpose of the subject; hence, the suitability and effectiveness of the course should be further studied. In addition, learners must also be heard as to know what is important for them when adopting and adapting to ODL, hence, their perceptions must be taken into serious consideration to further improve subjects taken at tertiary level. This will also provide insights to the teaching process for educators and policy makers to improve the content and pedagogies offered by the institutions. With that aim in mind, this study was conducted to discover students' expectations and perceptions on the content and delivery of an English oral presentation course during ODL.

Research Objectives
This study sought to determine students' expectations and experience of an oral presentation course in ODL.

Research Questions
1. What are the expectations of tertiary language learners have on an English oral presentation course?
2. How do tertiary language learners experience the undertaking of an English oral presentation course during open and distance learning (ODL)?

Literature Review
Online Distance Learning
Since the presence of the pandemic Covid-19, the term ODL has become very significant in the world of education. According to Siemens et al (2015), online learning means "a form of distance education where technology mediates the learning process, teaching is delivered completely using the Internet" and distance learning, more converging on achieving knowledge, has close meaning with distance education, which "is teaching and planned learning where the teaching occurs in a different place from learning" (p. 101). Thus, ODL is a method of teaching and learning from a distance by using the internet as a medium.

ODL has managed to create an advantage in a form of avenues for learners especially for those who are at the disadvantage of time and location not to be left out during their academic journey (Sadhegi, 2019; Zoborova et al, 2017). Not only that, Weidlich and Bastiaens, (2018) found that students who underwent ODL methods managed to complete the programme faster than traditional classes. Moreover, Fatimah (2020) in her study reveals that students conveyed positive responses towards their engagement in online environment. Apart from all the encouraging feedbacks on this method, ODL has also its drawbacks. Hubler (2020) reported that about one out of three students say that they have cheated during online tests. Not only that, Lee-Post and Hapke (2017) did a survey on juniors and seniors in an online course, and alarmingly, over 45% students claimed that cheating online was easy and meanwhile 30% claimed that they would cheat if they were to be given the opportunity to do so. Thus, it can be concluded that ODL has both advantages and disadvantages.

Oral Presentation Skills
Oral presentation skills are indispensable and pervasive in tertiary education. Students can never run away from the fact that most of the time assignments would have to be assessed and presented orally as part of the course requirement. It is proven to be widely used in the academic setting (Doree, Jardine & Linton, 2007) and institutions all over the world have acknowledged the necessity of equipping students with effective communication skills (Mercer-Mapstone & Matthews, 2017). In line with the education goals to nurture global citizens in the 21st century, presentation skills, one of the facets under communication skills, are necessary for any tertiary-level student. Oral presentation skills also play an important role especially in foreign language teaching in term of assessing students' productive language skills (Miles, 2009).

Oral presentation skill is deemed essential to be integrated in the learning process as it allows student to communicate as well as creates interaction in class and enhances interest in learning (Girard, Pinar & Trapp 2011). With that, King, (2002) proposed five advantages of conducting oral presentation in language classes which are promoting student-centered learning, providing students with realistic language task, having value outside the language classroom, improving students' motivations, and using all four language skills. On the other hand, oral presentation skills have weaknesses too. Students encountered face time management issues and ineffective presentation as they cannot present important points due to time constrain.

Nevertheless, learners have the tendency to show excitement and enthusiasm, engage in tasks required of them and extend their efforts even more once they recognise the real-life

applications of the oral presentation skills (McDougall & Holden, 2017), deem them as meaningful learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005), have positive association and value on a subject or task (Al-Nouh, Abdul-Kareem & Taqi, 2015), and possess autonomy in their own learning (Novawan, Alvarez-Tosalem, Ismailia & Wicaksono, Setiarini, 2021). Thus, it is imperative for an oral presentation course to be able to develop and enhance learners' presentation skills to equip them with these needed skills not only for the course itself, but for other courses as well.

Oral Presentation Course in ODL
The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has forced some educators to teach oral presentation course in ODL. This will not be an easy task since learners as well as educators will encounter several challenges along the way. Moreover, teaching oral presentation skills online would be a new experience for most educators. Though various platforms are available to execute the teaching process, Blum (2020) cited that a lot of unfavourable feedbacks such as "online teaching is exhausting, more so than face-to-face teaching"; "preparation time takes much longer as old materials have to be adapted for the online lesson"; "students are not turning on cameras which makes teaching more difficult"; "my lesson has become much more teacher centred as I get limited feedback from students"; "students prefer to type comments in the chat rather than ask questions using their microphone"; "I'm not sure if students are understanding my input"; "there are 'ghost' students who log in but don't respond to my questions".

Despite the challenges mentioned above, Yuan and Wu (2020) believe that this new teaching experience can provide deeper learning opportunities for students to create new experience. Students will be able to explore beyond the classroom walls thus maximizing the learning process (Watts, 2016). This concurs with the study conducted by Anggara (2020), which claims that the success of teaching speaking skills in online environment requires simple yet meaningful solution. It is proven by re-designing the lesson plan and activity from face-to-face to online learning, comparing the result from face to face and online assessment, and analyzing the students' attitude to the new learning environment.

When it comes to designing an oral presentation course, developers must ensure that the overview of the course is comprehensive and clear and arranged logically as technicality is essential for online learning (Yu, 2002) and comprehension of the course content should be the first priority in course design (King, 2002), tasks and resources are sufficient and effective (Goodyear, 2010; Nowreyah et al., 2015), as well as communication between parties involved is effective (Simonson, Zvacek & Smaldino, 2019; Subotzky & Primsloo, 2011). Once these are considered, many effects can be observed. For instances, Rockland (2007), Simonson, Zvacek, and Smaldino (2019) and Subotzky and Primsloo (2011) stated that learning the basics of presentations would reduce students' anxiety and enhance their self-confidence. In addition, effective oral presentation skills development would allow learners to nurture organizational, writing, critical thinking, research, and listening skills as well as self-confidence (Carlin & Payne, 1995) and have the skills to deliver information clearly and concisely as well as act as an advocate to affect listeners' attitudes, beliefs, and actions (Lucas, 2008).

Methodology

A qualitative approach and a case study were employed in the study to investigate students' expectations and perceptions of a presentation course in ODL. This research aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and its significance for those involved in the course. By placing students' voices in the foreground, this will enable researchers to understand their reactions and perceptions towards their own learning experience. Ercan, Irgil, Sigirli, Ozen and Kan (2008) further supported this with the claim that by investigating students' perceptions, researchers can access what is going on in their minds. This is significant as the course selected, Effective Presentation Skills (ALS251) is a newly designed course and has been taught to diploma students of LG120 Diploma in English for Professional Communication for just a year. The content for this course includes the process during a speech communication, verbal and non-verbal communication, methods of delivery, and significance of oral presentation skills. The objectives of this course are students would be able to display effective presentation skills, display social skills, leadership, and teamwork skills in preparing for and delivering oral presentations. Microsoft Teams was used as one of the learning management systems (LMS) and Telegram was used as a medium of communication between the instructor and students.

The participants of the study were ten diploma students (7 females and 3 males) undertaking a presentation skills course in UiTM. Their English proficiency levels were between intermediate to advanced level. A thorough semi-structured interview was conducted with the participants as it is a constructive method for qualitative data collection which the researchers used to collect open-ended data and investigate participant's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs on a specific issue. The open-ended interview questions were formed by the researchers based on interview questions accumulated from previous studies. The data collected were reviewed after the interview to ensure data collected was accurate and then transcribed and labelled. For unclear responses that needed more elaborations, the participants were contacted via Telegram and further questions were asked using Telegram chat for more clarifications as well as to refrain from presumption and misinterpretation. Data gathered from the interview were descriptively analysed based on inductive thematic analysis.

Results

The results of the data collected for this study are categorised into participants' expectations prior undertaking the English oral presentation course and participants' experiences after having to take the English oral presentation course in ODL.

Learners' Expectations

Before undertaking the oral presentation course, P1, P2, P8, and P9 anticipated that one of the major highlights of the course is to focus on the production skills and the application of their knowledge where the participants believed that they would be required to conduct and perform in-class oral presentations. The participants further opined that these speaking activities would take place numerous times during the course. At the same time, one participant (P1) further noted that they should be expected to be critical during the process of preparing and presenting an effective presentation.

Besides, participants (P3, P5, P7, P8, P9) also claimed that they would be equipped with the knowledge on how to deliver effective oral presentations. Participants are mentally prepared with the possibility that students of the course would be introduced with the format of presentations and methods for effective oral presentation delivery. P7 further mentioned that with effective presentation skills learned during the course will help in conveying messages clearer to the audience.

In addition to expectations on the content of the course, P4 and P7 demonstrated a positive impression towards the course even before taking it. P7 explained that the course is appealing for people who prefer the productive skill, speaking in this case, in English as the second language. Another notable finding is the theme required skill as mentioned by P3. The participant expected that with the input received during the course, would further help in giving oral presentation in the academic setting, such as during speaking activities in other classes as well as in assessments which require students to give oral presentations.

Hence, students perceived the oral presentation course would offer a platform for them to practice on their speaking skills specifically on delivering presentations and techniques or methods on improving their oral presentation skills. Prior to taking the subject, students embraced the fact that they would be exposed to numerous activities involving oral presentations as well as learn various types of presentations with the objective of delivering a successful presentation, with a positive impression in mind.

Learners' Experience
Regarding participants' experience while taking the course in an integrated technology environment, all participants responded positively in terms of their understanding of the course content as P1, P2, P3, P5, P8, P10 mentioned they faced no issues in comprehending the course content even in ODL setting. Claims specifically made by the participants mentioning that the content was easy to understand (P2), well-structured (P3), simple and straightforward (P5). P1, P5, and P10 added that comprehension of the content was enhanced as extra supportive materials were provided weekly in an organized manner for the students' easy access on the LMS platform set up by the university. In other words, the content provided was sufficient for students' understanding of the course objective and requirements. With regards to implementation of ODL for the course, P2 and P9 found that ODL did not hinder the comprehension and learning process as they felt the content prepared by the instructor was easy to understand and made learning more fun. P10 did, however, mention that regardless of having understood the objectives of the course and its contents, ODL does present a hindrance to their learning process and making them less motivated to learn virtually.

Aside from these positive responses, participants also shared their negative experiences in taking oral presentation course during ODL as found in the responses from P3, P4, P6, P7, P9, and P10. For instance, P4 pointed out that certain contents were difficult to grasp simply by reading the slides or notes prepared by the instructor. Students needed more guidance as juggling among the many platforms used made the process of understanding the content more challenging and distracting. Some content also required more attention and explanation from the instructor (P6, P9). They felt that content such as persuasive speech (a type of speech) should be accompanied with more activities to further support their understanding.

The participant, in addition, stated that the ability to further understand the content could be enhanced by improving the transition of the content from one topic to another so as students could relate the previous content to the current topic at hand (P10). Meanwhile, participants also claimed that they are more motivated with the presence of friends as they could have understood better with further discussions among themselves (P7). They found ODL made comprehension more taxing and progress slower due to unstable internet connection.

Discussion

As the course was just being introduced to the tertiary level students, this research aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and its significance for those involved in the course. The study results allow new discoveries on strengths and limitations of the oral presentation course which could later be strengthened and improved based on learners' expectations and experiences expressed by the participants.

Learners' Expectations

What was mutually found about the participants' perceptions about the course is the four emergent themes: practice, required skill, knowledge, and positive impressions. Participants believed that the ability to understand and practice during the course is highly valued and deemed important. They also noted that the activities allowed them to practice and apply presentation skills in real-life situations. As claimed by McDougall and Holden (2017), students have the tendency to engage in tasks required of them once they recognise the real-life applications of the oral presentation skills, even though there are risks and responsibilities that are required from them. Students would even engage with activities that will help and apply them to perform or solve issues that they personally confront in their daily life which will inevitably ignite and encourage meaningful learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). Since they believe that developing these required skills allows them the opportunity for application in real-life situations and for self-improvement, students would even extend their learning and effort (McDougall & Holden, 2017).

Goodyear (2009) claimed that instructors of tertiary level educations have the task to responsibly design not only good learning tasks, but also the resources, as both are significantly responsible for students to stand a chance of succeeding in the activities planned. Teachers are required to plan the content of the oral presentation course content which later will provide information and support for students to present effectively. Without such knowledge, students could not perform to meet the objectives of the course. Participants' expectations were in line with the main objective of the English oral presentation course which is to understand and display effective presentation skills for English professional communication.

Apart from that, other significant themes are the students' positive impression even before taking the course. In a study by Al-Nouh, Abdul-Kareem, and Taqi (2015), it is noted that students' personal belief predetermines their performance in their study. The more students place positive association and value on a particular subject or task, the more they are inclined to participate and complete tasks, and even try to overcome challenges they encounter during their learning process.

Learners' Experience
Participants and students of the course illustrated their experiences positively when learning the content of the course in the ODL setting in three emergent themes, course content, content delivery and technical knowledge.

Course Content
The content was clear and comprehensive for the students. This reveals that the oral presentation course content suits the needs of the students' level of comprehension across gender, learning styles, proficiency, even though the setting of the teaching and learning has undergone a rapid shift to ODL. The finding is similar to a study done by Yu (2002) in which participants of the study also agreed that comprehension of course content could be achieved effectively as the overview of the course is comprehensive and clear. Participants also claimed to be able to connect and relate one content to another since the content was arranged in a logical manner (Yu, 2002). Thus, this highlights the significance of designing content for a course.

Comprehension is the first step in the step-by-step procedure of designing an oral presentation course according to King (2002). Once students' basic need (clear understanding of the content) is met, students would develop positive perceptions towards the course, as agreed by Rockland (2007) who noted that learning the basics of presentations would reduce students' anxiety. Students are made aware of what is required of them to complete and consequently at the end of the course improve their skills in oral presentations and other related skills. As mentioned by Carlin and Payne (1995), developing effective oral presentation skills would allow learners to nurture organizational, writing, critical thinking, research, and listening skills as well as self-confidence.

On the other hand, participants believed that some content required further assistance from the lecturer to enhance understanding, specifically persuasive speech. This may be due to its nature as Lucas (2008) mentioned a persuasive speaker must have the skills to deliver information clearly and concisely as well as must act as an advocate to affect listeners' attitudes, beliefs, and actions. Despite that, they explained that comprehension was developed via assistance from further attention and explanation from the lecturer as well as activities to support students' understanding. Thus, evidently understanding of course content relates closely to the content delivery by the lecturer and the role that they play during the teaching and learning of the oral presentation course.

Content Delivery
In terms of content delivery, comprehension was further enriched as extra materials were provided to the students. As Goodyear (2010) states when designing a course, one vital aspect is the resources that students will need for them to stand a chance to succeed in the tasks and assessment that is required for the course. Nowreyah et al. (2015) claim that in situations where students face challenges in delivering oral presentations, they could be associated with the lack of oral presentation courses tailored to prepare them with the necessary skills to present in the academic setting effectively. Hence, by providing sufficient resources that are designed for students to perform effectively in oral presentations in academic and professional settings.

However, the participants highlighted the problem they faced during learning the course is the transition or flow of the content from one content to another, tasks, and assessments. They included that the well-organised transition would help in their understanding of the course content. Yu (2002) supported this by claiming that when contents are delivered in a logical order, students' comprehension of the course content and the objective of the course would improve their engagement and performance in the lesson.

On the other hand, as shared by the participant, self-learning has influenced their motivation level. Another challenge in ODL is as participants expressed that they had difficulty when learning in isolation without physical face-to-face support from friends. Participants claimed that with the presence of friends, they could understand content better as communicating, discussing, and sharing of knowledge could easily be done face-to-face. As supported by Simonson, Zvacek and Smaldino, (2019) and Subotzky and Primsloo (2011), effective communication allows information to be shared and exchanged between parties clearly, in this case, students, which in the end could further enhance their self-confidence especially in online learning. Societal

Technical Knowledge
Positive perceptions from participants could also be recorded in terms of technical knowledge. Some participants acknowledged that learning was more fun and virtually interactive as platforms (Microsoft Teams and Telegram) used during the learning process are perhaps familiar and made familiar to the students, further boosting students' apprehension on the course content. This was mentioned in a study by Novawan et al. (2021) who noted that students' learning experience has positively enhanced students' excitement and enthusiasm in learning as students are more motivated to learn.

Unfortunately, the ODL setting does pose challenges as claimed by the participants of the study. Major setback of e-learning is the technical issues students faced during remote learning. Participants disclosed that the internet connection made understanding the content difficult. As distance learning is done remotely, teaching and learning employ various electronic devices and platforms. Should teachers' and students' necessities become disrupted, it presents a barrier for students' comprehension, motivation, participation, and performance during their learning process. The same finding was found in a study by Yu (2002) in which participants also expressed technicality as one of the issues faced in technology-adapted learning.

Nonetheless, it was also revealed that regardless of the issues faced, learning in the virtual setting could enable students to learn at their own pace, time and needs; making students become more active and independent learners. Novawan et al. (2021) also presented a finding that students experienced learning online positively as learners have autonomy to their own learning. For this to be achieved, students expect teachers to carefully plan the lessons and provide materials needed for their understanding which will enable them to learn on their own and perform in tasks required which will also build their motivation in virtual learning.

The data garnered was revealed that the integration of the technological knowledge, content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge could be one of the solutions to issues in technology-

supported learning. Should instructors be knowledgeable on the content, pedagogy and technology, the teaching and learning of an oral presentation course in ODL could be improved. However, continuous engagement among these elements is incomplete without support from teachers and friends. Educators must be aware of the importance of their role in creating a supportive social environment to enhance their online learning experience.

Conclusion

Learners' expectations and experience of the newly designed oral presentation course disclosed that the course content suits the needs required for them to achieve the course objectives and even apply skills acquired in real life settings. Learning the course through ODL does pose easiness as well as difficulties for students. However, pedagogic change in online learning could be improved by providing suitable course content, course delivery, technical knowledge, as well as support that are necessary for students to learn online effectively.

Limitations and Future Studies

The study involves limited number of participants, thus, to gain substantial insight, future research should be conducted with greater involvement from participants of diverse demographic background. Lecturers' perceptions also could be taken into consideration in future studies since education consolidates between learners and teachers.

Acknowledgement

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