



European Journal of Educational Management

Volume 3, Issue 1, 1 - 5.

ISSN: 2642-2344

<http://www.eujem.com/>

Classroom Based Assessment: Deciphering role of language in Oral Presentation Assessment

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Received: March 4, 2020 • Revised: May 10, 2020 • Accepted: June 15, 2020

Abstract: Self Directed learning, oral presentation and peer group assessment are some of the phrases gaining momentum in the domain of teaching and learning. The merits and challenges in using them had attracted the attention of many educational researches. This study hopes to contribute by investigating one element which plays an important role in oral presentation. Language plays an important role in conveying the message. The uniqueness of this study lies in the language used by the presented and the participants. The Sign Language was used, where the raters consist of two groups of people. Only one group knows the sign language. The participants of study are 36 pre-service teachers. A total of 20 pre-service teachers are undergoing training to become hearing impaired special education teachers. As such, sign language is included in the programme. The balance 16 pre-service teachers enrolled in TESL programme. The presenter, himself is a hearing impaired pre-service teacher. Therefore, he had to use the sign language during his oral presentation, know sign language. The pre-service teachers had assessed the presenter using three criteria. These are communication, content and delivery. The findings show that comprehension and interpreting the rubrics used during oral presentation is crucial. As such it is suggested that students are consulted when drawing the rubrics.

Keywords: *Self directed learning, oral presentation, peer group assessment, sign language.*

To cite this article: Ramanaidu, R. R., & Kutty, S. R. (2020). Classroom based assessment: Deciphering role of language in oral presentation assessment. *European Journal of Educational Management*, 3(1), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eujem.3.1.1>

Introduction

An innovative approach in classroom based assessment is self-directed learning (SDL). Smedly (2007) associated SDL with increased curiosity, critical thinking, quality of understanding, retention and recall, better decision making, achievement satisfaction, motivation, competence and confidence. An alternative assessment which is gaining momentum in the context of teaching and learning (T&L) is oral presentation (OP) and peer group (PG).

OP and PG assessment provides numerous benefits for students. Among them are improvement in students' motivation, autonomy in learning and enhancement of critical analysis (Sunol et al., 2016). The effectiveness of combining OP and PG assessment in alternative assessment has its shares of supporters and opponents. Nevertheless, many agree that, combining OP and PG reduces dramatically the limitations in assessing students' understanding (Magin & Helmore, 2001). Magin and Helmore (2001) posits that accuracy and reliability of marks awarded to students increases when the number of assessors increases.

Involving students in awarding marks augurs well in giving autonomy to learners. In earlier phase, incorporating peer assessment in the final grades had raised doubts on the validity and reliability of judgment. Studies such as Falchikov's (1995), had given suggestions on how to incorporate peer assessment in the final grades. By averaging the scores given by peers, differences in marks are reduced dramatically. Infact, Falchikov (1995) had shown the difference between the lecturer's marks and the students (obtained through peer assessment) was small. For some, combination of OP and PG increases the overall reliability of marks awarded to the students (Sunol et al., 2016).

The rational for reduction of drawbacks of OP and PG assessment lies in the role of audience and the communication skills utilised by the presenter used during presentations. The communication skills domain which plays a prominent role is the language used during presentation. Studies by Hanrahan and Isaacs (2001) revealed that students have

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difficulties in assessing communication skills. One way of overcoming the discrepancy in assessment is by applying a common set of assessment criteria.

A well defined list of criteria plays an important role in assessment. Often evaluators prepare the rubric outlining the criteria. It is utmost important for the test-takers and the raters to comprehend the rubric (K. Ghalib & A. Al-Hattami, 2015). Often it is the raters who take the interest to relate the criteria to the test-takers.

Assessment criteria has its own set of challenges too. Among them are interpreting them. In OP, the common set of criteria used are; language used during presentation, content of presentation and the delivery of content. The tendency to apply them differently, occurs. Differences in the interpretation between teachers and students' can be reduced dramatically over time.

In professional training, such as teacher training, greater involvement of students in the assessment process could help in alleviating developing skills for professional responsibility, judgement and autonomy (Falchikov, 1988). Ability to assess students is a skill which all teachers should have. As such the distinction of this study lies in the respondents involved. The respondents are pre-service teachers (PST) who are currently undergoing training, and eventually will be conducting assessment on their own of their students. The aims of this paper are two. First to analyse and compare the marks awarded by pre-service teachers of different classes i.e Special Education and Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). Followed by determining the role of language in OP and peer assessment. The medium of instruction is unique, in the sense that, the presenter is a hearing impairment PST and unable to speak. His mode of communication is the American Sign Language. On the other hand, the raters consist of two groups. Only one group knows sign language.

SDL enables pre-service teachers to be flexible, open to change and be confident (Hinchliff & Dolan, 2017). Combination of OP and SDL would help pre-service teachers to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals and identify resources which would enhance their learning (Shen et.al, 2014).

Methodology

A total of 35 PST were involved in the data collection. At the beginning of the semester, briefing on the coursework was given by the course coordinator. The PST involved in this study consists of two different options. The differences lies in the program the PST are registered in. Of the PST, 19 are enrolled in training to become Special Education teachers, specialising in teaching hearing impaired students. While the remaining 16 PST are training to become TESL teachers.

The presenter i.e hearing impaired PST, training to become a special education teacher. For the purpose of this study, only this hearing impaired PST presented on that day. The presentation is assessed by two groups of PST. Only the 19 special education teachers know the sign language. To maintain anonymity and differentiate these two group; PST from the special education were tagged as PST101 till PST119, while those from the English Language were tagged as PST901-PST916.

Though these PST were from different groups, both were required to take some common subjects. Among them is "Digital Innovation in Teaching and Learning". This course is compulsory for all Semester Six PST. It is a one semester course. PST are expected to generate ideas in producing digital innovation in teaching and learning using an appropriate digital tool. The assessment for the course comprises of four tasks. (See Table 1).

Table 1: Course Assessment Tasks

No	Methods of Assessment	Description	Weightage (%)
1	Proposal Presentation	Present a proposal on innovation project.	10
2	Innovation Project	Produce an innovation based on a teaching and learning problem	70
3	Report	Write a report, reporting the effectiveness of the innovation product in solving teaching and learning problems	10
4	Quiz	Answer short structural questions within 30 minutes.	10

Part of the proposal presentation, PST are required to present their innovation project, orally. During presentation, PST are allowed to use computer and LCD projectors. At the beginning of the course, a briefing on the assignment tasks was given to all the PST. During the briefing, discussion on the rubric was made. The rubric is a set of criteria, or what counts, describing level of quality from excellent to poor (Andrade & Du, 2005). Assessment is made of three aspects. They are (i) Communication, (ii) Content and (iii) Delivery. Performance is rated using marks on a 10-point scale, with 1 being the lowest score and 10 the highest score.

Each PST is provided with a sheet of paper, to enter assessments marks. A space in the score sheet is provided for comments on each aspects. The data obtained is analysed in two ways. The mean of each aspects is computed. To determine whether there is a difference between the two groups of PST, independent T-test was used. To determine the role of the language, comments provided by the PST is analysed. Thematic analysis was employed for this purpose. The five steps proposed by Castleberry and Nolen (2018) was used. They are compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding.

Results

Table 2 shows the mean of each aspects. Table 3 shows the statistical difference between the two groups of PST. The results show that there is no significant difference between the options i.e Special Education and TESL.

Table 2: Mean of each Aspect (by group)

Aspects	Options					
	Special Education			TESL		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Communication	19	8.42	1.02	16	8.44	0.89
Content	19	8.21	1.18	16	7.88	1.41
Delivery	19	8.21	.787	16	8.31	1.49

Table 3: Statistical Difference

Aspects	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Communication	-0.05	0.96
Content	0.75	0.46
Delivery	-0.25	0.81

The remarks by the PST was analysed used the thematic analysis. Three main themes emerged from the analysis. They are "Using of aid", "Details of the rubric" and "Clarity of delivery".

Using of aid to present.

To enhance the presentation, presenters often use gadgets. During the presentation, the PST who presented, had used a laser pointer. He used it to direct the attention of the audience or when wanted to stress a point. However, unconsciously, the PST was using the laser pointer through out the presentation. As such, the audience's attention could be divided into two broad categories. PST101-PST119 (who knows sign language) were looking at the hand signs made by the presenter. While PST901-PST916 were looking at the screen to comprehend what was presented.

During the Q&A session, the presenter used two different approaches. When responding to PST who knows sign language, he used sign language, while for others he used the white board to write his response. Such diverse approach, shows the flexibility and adaptability of the presenter. His approach shows, ultimate aim of a presentation is the audience should understand what is being presented. His approach shows in presentation, priority should be given in getting the message across. However in awarding the marks, PST who knows sign language penalised for using the white board to response. PST105 felt he should stick to his mode of language i.e sign language when answering to questions instead of using the whiteboard.

Details of the rubric

Whether evaluation of the presentation should be at its entirety or diagnostically is not made known to the PST. Reddy (2007) advocates that giving a score using a rubric should be based holistically, while Mertler (2001) promotes analytic scoring. Though both approaches has their merits, PST were asked to provide a score for each component of the rubric i.e Communication, Content and Delivery.

PST901 included ability to answer the questions posed by the audience as a criteria for communication, while another PST907 felt it should be in the aspect of delivery. As such this pose a problem for the rater, on how to decide the rubric for assessment. On one dimension, assessment as learning (AAL) encourages holistic marking, but specifying in details the criteria would be seen as analytic marking.

A rubric acts as a guidance. The assessor should use discretion in awarding marks. For example, body language is not mentioned in the rubric and assessor is expected to know this. PST911 showed this by considering "*having eye-contact & open body language*". in the communication aspects. PST912 "*Presenter communicated with audience through eye contact and movement.*". PST115 "*usage of facial expression made the presentation interesting*". But PST102 felt the presenter should engage in communication with the audience (Note: PST102 knows sign language).. Contrasingly, PST113 praised the presenter by noting "*there is a two way communication*". Meanwhile PST107 (TESL option)

commended the presenter for using signs which were universal in nature - "*vocabulary used (sign language) is easy to follow*".

Clarity of delivery

Language is meant as a form of communication. In a presentation, language plays the role of mediator in conveying the message. In the context of this study, the language is the sign language. The importance of understanding a presentation can be seen through PST112 response. PST112 "*good communication skill even though we didn't have basics of sign language.*" displays 'sign language' is only the medium, but the message is well understood by the audience.

PST901-916 do not know the American Sign Language, used by the presenter. Yet PST904 gave a score of 9/10 for content and noted that "*the content is very organised and easy to understand*". Thus the question, was the PST904 was relying on the Powerpoint slides shown by the presenter only? By right the Powerpoint is only a guide. The fact that PST904 relied on the Powerpoint, shows that the objective of incorporating 'presentation' as an assessment does not augurs well for the students, more so in the context of peer assessment. For PST are more concerned in the Powerpoint, and not on the ability of the PST to present in an orderly manner.

Only one PST i.e PST107 stated that "*rely a lot on the slides and just restating of what is in the slide.*" the presenter relied on the Powerpoint to deliver the message wanted to get across!

During assessment, some emphasis on the technical details of the slides is important. For example, PST109 felt the font type and size used in the Powerpoint should be of same. PST109 "*it was difficult to read some slides, should use bigger font size*". Such reliance could be interpreted as reliance on visual aid (such as Powerpoint) to comprehend.

Policy Recommendations

Assessment of pre-service teachers had shifted from summative assessment to formative assessment. Such change can be seen in the courses meant for teacher training. None of the courses, rely on final examination alone as assessment. Instead the kind of assessment can be seen, in which the lecturers were required either to rely solely on course work or a combination of course work and examination.

Such practices augur well in the teaching and learning. By emphasizing on formative assessment, these PST are exposed to the means and approaches which could be used to assess a student. Understanding and ability to use the formative assessment tools are crucial in changing the landscape of assessment in the context of teaching and learning. When the lecturers employ the formative approach, pre-service teachers should be able to see that it (formative assessment) enhances the learning of students (Cestone, Levine, & Lane 2008).

Many have doubts on the reliability and validity of peer assessment. Using them in the formal assessment had many educators questioning the pedagogical intent of assessment. For instance Swanson et.al (1991) had casted doubt on the ability of students in judging the communication skills. However findings of this study, revealed assessment are reliable too. Upon graduating as teachers, these PST would need to carry assessment in their respective classroom. As such by taking into consideration their assessment, will certainly boost their self-confidence. Ultimately, it is hoped these PST would employ peer assessment when in teaching.

Humour and laughter play an important role in our lives. Combination of humour and laughter will enhance learning (Pozsonyi & Soulstein, 2019). Similar stance also applies in a presentation. The presenter in this study tried to inject humour in his presentation. His facial expressions made some of the audience to laugh along with him. Nevertheless, whether they (those who laugh along) were laughing at the humour or were just playing along with the presenter is unproven. Yet, language plays an significant role when telling a joke. However, in a presentation the note by PST914 (who do not know sign language) - "got sense of humour" plays down the role of language.

Inserting humour requires skills and knowledge. Berk's (2014) study showed that with the aid of powerpoint, inserting humour is possible. As such, it augurs well in the development of teaching skills, that a course of injecting humour in teaching and learning is introduced.

Usage of aids such as 'laser pointer' should be made clear at the beginning. Whether to penalise or reward, using aids to enhance understanding of audience should be made clear. Judging from communication perspective, whether the receiver understands what is being communicated is more important than medium used. Nevertheless in OP, some are more concern of the medium than the message! Such discrepancy in assessing could be avoided, by seeking the views of students when drafting the rubrics. In PG, often students are reluctant to use rubrics when assessing their classmates (Norcini, 2003). Hence through the involvement of students when setting the rubric, such reluctance can be reduced.

Exposing PST to OP and PG is in tandem with the shift in the assessment domain taking place. Emphasizing assessment as learning (AAL) more than assessment of learning (AOL) and assessment for learning augurs well for the empowerment of student in their learning. To gauge pre-service teachers (PST) understanding of concepts and knowledge, lecturers engage the use of oral presentation (OP). Besides displaying understanding of concepts, OP is expected to enable PST to transmit information, ideas, problems and solutions related to T&L.

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