Multimedia-Enhanced English Presentation Training With the Audience in Mind

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Abstract
This study presents the initial findings from a comprehensive 16-week presentation skills training program designed for Taiwanese college students who possess intermediate to advanced English proficiency. The program utilized multimedia tutorials on infographics and various presentation tools, and provided one-on-one diagnostic sessions as well as workshops by field experts on modern presentation requirements which included communication proficiency and visual hierarchy. The study found that the training significantly improved the students' understanding of effective English presentations, resulting in increased cohesion of verbal-visual communication skills. The program also resulted in a growth of presenters' awareness of the audience. It strongly validates the effectiveness of a multimodal approach to training nonnative English speakers, highlighting the importance of including linguistic and visual components in presentation training for academic and professional success.

Keywords: English Presentation, Language Learners, Multimedia, Awareness of the Audience

Introduction

Making successful English presentations nowadays is reckoned as an essential skill academically and professionally. Compared to native English speakers (NESs), due to plausible linguistic challenge in using English as a lingua franca, most nonnative counterparts may experience much higher cognitive load during oral presentations, when sharing complex knowledge in English-medium-instruction classrooms or international workplaces. According to Berman and Cheng, this advanced productive academic skill is considered arduous to most international students, to the extent that the high language demands strain grade point averages (GPA)—more so at the graduate than the undergraduate level. For graduate students and scientists, their lack of communication skills can lead to frustration when presenting at conferences. The damage could extend beyond educational settings if the quality of their oral presentations fails to meet expectations in the workplace.

Moreover, when envisioning a successful presentation, one does not only picture a brilliant monologue; the sole focus on improving verbal delivery in the past no longer suffices. Nowadays, verbal presentation training emphasizes that presentations should be visually pleasant, adopt clear information organization, and apply technology tools effectively-multimodal information delivery is highly valued and sought-after. In other words, for English learners, in comparison to NESs, the use of visuals (or other forms of multimedia) is more crucial when presenting their ideas. However, developing the crucial skill set requires deliberate and focused training: the skill mastery and practices are rarely included in school curriculum. Most students learn to present implicitly by mimicking their teachers or peers through observation and imitation. Therefore, the comprehensive design of presentation training in this study showcases how the 23 Taiwanese college students refine their English presentations through a strong combination of verbal and visual communications to elevate communication quality with the audience. This ongoing study has already yielded fruitful preliminary results, validating the effectiveness and necessity of the instructional design.

Mayer's (2020) Multimedia Learning Theory, lending a strong basis to guide the components of visualization in education, identifies three main principles for designing effective multimedia presentations: Multimedia Principle, Coherence Principle, and Signaling Principle. That is, people learn better when words are complimented with pictures rather than words alone, when extraneous material is excluded rather than included, and when cues are added to highlight the organization and structure of the essential material. In the context of multimedia presentation, his theory emphasizes on the necessity for presenters to apply visual hierarchy to guide the viewer's attention from vital to peripheral information using perceptual cues such as color, contrast, and size. In other words, presenters are responsible for facilitating their audience to process complex information more effectively. From this perspective, the creation of presentation materials necessitates an understanding and awareness of the audience's needs and preferences. Mayer's theory (2020) offers a framework for designing effective presentations by combining verbal and visual information to work around human's limited attention. In this paper, students' substantial progress will validate the application of these principles to complement the existing verbal training.

Methodology

The on-site training designed for the elective course titled "English Presentation with Multimedia and Communication Strategies" has a total duration of 16 weeks—with participants aged between 20 and 25, and with their English proficiencies ranging from

higher intermediate to advanced. All have given the consent to be included in this study. The multimedia tutorials target the production of infographics, advanced functions of *PowerPoint*, *Prezi* (www.prezi.com), *Powtoon* (www.powtoon.com), *Canva* (www.canva.com), as well as a well-known audience response system *Slido* (https://www.sli.do/). Many handy apps or online graphic editing tools which provide users with the ability to make simple graphic alterations without requiring extensive knowledge of complex design software. Refining visual materials, whether for aesthetic appeal or to illustrate concepts, aids student presenters in visually engaging their audience during verbal communication. Moreover, multiple field experts join the teaching to model qualities of presentation desired in the workplace. They respectively enrich the training in the form of workshops to familiarize students with the know-how in Visual Literacy, Infographic Design, and Public Speech. Collectively, considerable measures are taken to tailor the delivery of information to suit the target audience's preferences and presenters' objectives. In short, verbal skills, content visualization, and tool mastery form the comprehensive instructional design identifies the multimodal essence of modern English presentation training. Figure 1 shown below is the illustration of the instructional design.

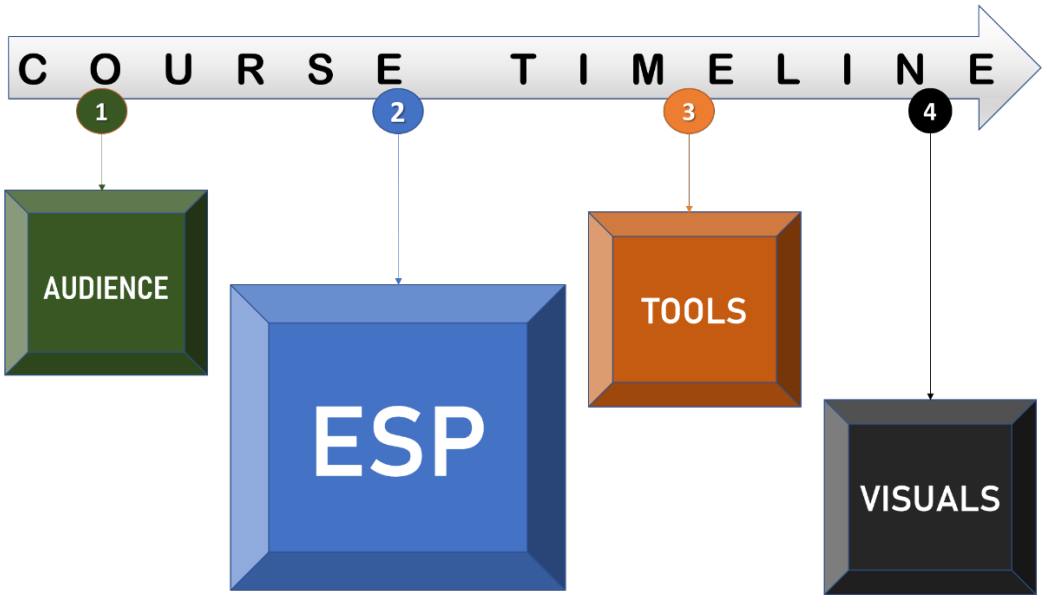

Figure 1: Instructional design
Note: The relative length of the modules is represented by the size of the color blocks

Module 1. Awareness of the Audience: This module aims to turn monologue to dialogue in a presentation with the purpose to turn silent audience to active learners. The prerequisite is the right mindset on the presenter's side: the awareness of the audience. To be more specific, a presentation ought to be participatory; remaining oblivious to audience engagement while unleashing nonstop PowerPoint (PPT) slides might suffice for a presentation in the past, but audiences today have higher expectations. Hence, the first module advocates the design of a presentation should revolve around the target audience: collective/individual background, interests, bias, existing knowledge on the topic…etc. The practice tackles the design of hooks, the ending, guiding/rhetorical questions, and "wow factors" (to impress the audience)—all included in the training from the outset and listed in the evaluation rubrics. Simultaneously, audience feedback is collected to enlighten student presenters about their performance, especially regarding the reception of their intended messages.

Module 2. Verbal Command (ESP): A series of learning tasks are designed to improve students' fluency and accuracy in oral presentation in response to students' learning needs (designed to address learners needs per the entry survey results):

- Learning from the expert: Analysis on Steve Job's presentation model (targeting formulaic expressions, content organization…etc.) and emulation of other successful public speaking models.
- Advertising for a brilliant idea: Contrastive intonation and proper pauses exercise and proper rehearsal.
- 30-second impersonation (from TED presentations): Incorporating facial expressions and body language into verbal communication, as well as awareness of audience's presence.
- Market analysis: Reporting statistics and extracting info from big data and communication strategies.

Through the above tasks, students pay attention to the rigorous organization and logic flow of content delivery to define, explain, support, and most important augment key information/messages/concepts. Lastly, designing and adapting presentations with the audience in mind is vital in this part of the training.

Module 3. Presentation Tools: advanced *PPT* functions, *Canva*, *Prezi* and *Powtoon* are included. Students proceed with skill transfer from the known to the unknown; they progressively extend their skills from familiar tools like PowerPoint to more novel platforms such as Canva, Prezi, and Powtoon, often integrating these various tools and adding narration and/or music. The capacities of these distinctive tools lead the students to rethink possible ways to construct presentations. Meanwhile, they manifest not only the skills to operate the mediums but also analytical knowledge of the pros and cons of each tool. From this point on, they can select the most appropriate tools and modes to best support various objectives and accommodate a specific audience of presentations.

Canva is a popular graphic design platform that allows users to create a variety of visual content such as social media graphics, presentations, posters, infographics, and more. It provides a wide range of customizable templates, graphics, AI-generated images, and fonts to help users design professional-looking visuals without the need for advanced design skills. See canva.com for more detail. Second, Prezi is a cloud-based presentation software that allows users to create dynamic and visually engaging presentations using a zoomable canvas. It offers a non-linear approach to presenting information, allowing users to create a path through their content and zoom in and out of different sections to emphasize key points. See prezi.com for more detail. Third, Powtoon is a cloud-based platform for creating animated videos and presentations. It offers a variety of customizable templates, characters, backgrounds, and soundtracks to help users create engaging and visually appealing content. See powtoon.com for more detail.

Module 4. Visuals: In this module, the quality and quantity of visuals are emphasized—enough to enhance impression but not so excessive as to distract the audience. Meanwhile, the strategic arrangement and selection of visuals to augment while accentuating the intended messages are vital to achieve persuasion. Most important, students become aware that the use of visuals should work in harmony with textual and verbal rhetoric (according to Mayer's Multimedia Learning Theory). A large quantity of brilliant samples and templates are introduced to the students with guidance. This way their inventory of useful resources expands, and their self-efficacy rises.

Field practitioners periodically join the learning modules in the form of consecutive workshops to demonstrate how to effectively create info-graphics, aesthetically organize visual elements, harmoniously animate verbal-visual communication, and confidently deliver an intriguing speech. They also review students' products in the previous modules to tackle individual problems and offer invaluable feedback. The team-teaching benefit not only the participants but also myself as an instructor: I am now able to upgrade my instruction to teach visual literacy in greater depth.

With video recording on individual presentations throughout the semester, students have the opportunity to examine their speaking habits and skills; such as how they paused, how they used fillers, if they could accurately describe statistical results and data, and more. To customize the instruction, each student would have one-on-one diagnostic sessions with the instructor to assess their personal performance. During which logs are taken as a qualitative data source. An entry survey is implemented to investigate students' learning needs. The progress of their mastery in content visualization is demonstrated through two rounds of presentations, conducted at the beginning and mid-point of the semester. With multiple sources of data collection, mixed-method data analysis techniques were used to unfold the induced effects of the multifaceted training. The back-to-back comparison between the beginning and the mid-point of the semester reveals students' growing understanding of the expected qualities in English presentations. Although the program is still ongoing, students have already made promising progress.

Results

The two major challenges, ***communication strategies*** and ***composition of visual elements***, stood out among 10 dimensions (listed below with corresponding percentages) in the entry survey (implemented before the training). These two indicators are respectively discussed, followed by a comparison between students' initial status and midterm presentation performances and visual production in this section.

Ten dimensions investigated through the entry surveys:

1. Content (the results of my research/experience/observation...): 21.7%
2. Info-organization (building logic, break down complexity/abstractness...): 34.8%
3. Script (proper discourse, word choice, transitional phrases...):13%
4. Rehearsal (on-stage performance, posture...): 39.1%
5. Visuals (image, infographics, aesthetics): 52.2 %
6. Tech tool application/operation: 21.7%
7. Language (fluency, intonation, pronunciation...): 47.8%
8. Communication strategies (skills to impress/persuade the audience): 60.9%
9. Target audience (knowing their expectations, background, questions they might ask...): 21.7%
10. Topic choice and key messages (objective met, call to action heard, impression made...): 30.4%

Communication Strategies (60.9%)

Among 10 various dimensions, communication strategies (skills to impress or persuade the audience) was considered the most difficult aspect among all (60.9%) in the beginning of the semester. Take S1 for example, in her first presentation, she failed to give audience some thinking time to process the information she shared. She kept talking nonstop and fast to

exhibit her strong familiarity and full preparation of the content. She focused on verbal fluency and confidence yet overlooked the interaction with the audience and refrained herself from gestures. The following QR code shows her 30-sec footage, and below is the verbatim transcription from it in the entry recording:

Hi my name is _____. Today I am going to introduce a task called Dictogloss. It is a writing activity that can help students improve and practice their writing skills. Ok so here is my table of content. First I will introduce the features and the procedure of this writing task. And then some reminders before going to the conclusions. Ok, so in a historical view, Dictogloss is a strategy which was introduced in 1990 as an alternative method to study grammar.

As anyone can see that she jumped right into the core content without showing an intention to connect with the audience and help them understand the significance of the topic. In other words, she did not attempt to build common ground with them, despite exhibiting perfect verbal fluency.

Fortunately, after completing the first half of the training, she has made great improvements by becoming aware of her audience in the midterm recording: she enticed the audience and patiently gave them time to think and respond. Below are the footage and verbatim transcription of her opening 30 seconds in the midterm recording when giving a simulated marketing analysis. Double slashes // indicate her deliberate design to invite the audience to engage in her talk. Her body language and audience responses are recorded in parentheses.

Good afternoon, everyone //. (with a big smile, eye contact, and open arms). Okay, let's try again, good afternoon, everyone // (her 2nd attempt with a bigger smile finally gets many returned greetings). Ok, very good! Thank you. // I am the store representative from the Gongguan branch which is in the south of Taipei. And today I am going to do a quick data analysis for the upcoming big sales event which everyone is looking forward to, aren't we all? // (with a big smile, eye contact, and wider arms again, and returned with many head-nodding and laughter).

Her deliberation of placing long pauses to appeal audience attention reinforced with her body language was obviously effective. Although the total word count is fewer, she stirred up the interests and participation from the audience already, while the fluency still sounded good. The verbal communication quality has drastically improved.

Composition of Visuals (52.2%)

Different visual elements, to sustain and direct audience attention, should be arranged and combined to facilitate audience's cognition, i.e., information processing. This know-how

encompasses the use of principles such as balance, contrast, proportion, and hierarchy to create an overall sense of visual harmony and effectiveness in conveying a message or idea—enjoyable to read/view and supportive to presenters' verbal communication. However, this know-how was a void in students' perpetual curriculum and past schooling experience. This gap also reflected in students' learning needs revealed through the entry survey: over half of them already sensed the deficiency. They often watched TED Talks and identified the successful models to pursue—yet did not how to embark on a change.

Taking S2 for example, in her first presentation, the first four slides below (Figure 2.) evidently unveiled her lack of know-how to properly compose visual elements: no respect of readers' eye flow, the competition among multiple focal points, the unaesthetic and unbalanced arrangement of images.

Figure 2: Students' PPT slides before the training

After the first half of the training, she has improved significantly (see Figure 3.). Her mastery of various techniques: creating layers (of shades) for contrast between foreground and background, visual impact with vibrant color and oversized font, cohesive color scheme across slides, respect of aesthetics and eye flow (Z-shape route), proper combination of images and texts, effective use of infographics, and balanced amount of content and focal points in one slide. Apparently, she refined the image for post-production to create the visual coding; her tool mastery has elevated as well. All in all, she respected the three principles Mayer (2020) has identified: *Multimedia Principle, Coherence Principle,* and *Signalling Principle*. The progress she has made endorses the necessity of interdisciplinary training by including effective visualization in English presentation curriculum.

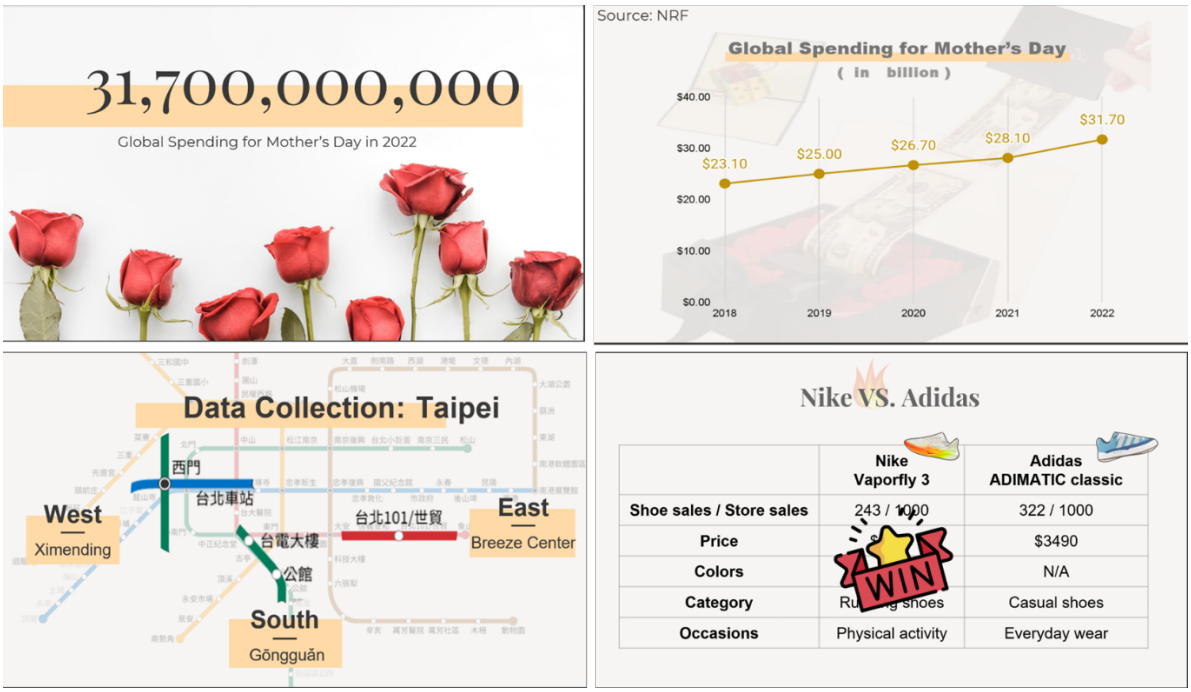

Figure 3. Slides after the first half of training

Conclusions

Fellow students' performances also drastically evolved: their creativity, aesthetics, awareness of audience, and imagery-expressions improved holistically along with their command of verbal communication. By familiarizing themselves with tech tools, they learned to select and combine based on presentation contents and objectives. Their applications of participative strategies to interact with audiences has become prominent. This research demonstrates the necessary inclusion of verbal-visual communication, multimedia tools, and communication strategies in English presentation training. Furthermore, the outcomes validate the effectiveness of the multimodal approach of innovative training for nonnative English speaking presenters, preferably early in their schooling experiences.

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