ĐIỀU TRA VỀ VIỆC ỨNG DỤNG KỸ THUẬT TRÌNH BÀY TRONG THUYẾT TRÌNH CỦA SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN ANH TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC LẠC HỒNG

Nguyễn Đức Duy Tân[1*], Đặng Thị Thu Hiền[2]

[1]*Trường Đại học Lạc Hồng, số 10 Huỳnh Văn Nghệ, Bửu Long, Biên Hòa, Đồng Nai,*
[2]*Trường THPT Nguyễn Khuyến, phường Thống Nhất, Biên Hòa, Đồng Nai,*
[*]*Tác giả liên hệ: duytan@lhu.edu.vn*

TÓM TẮT

Với sự phổ biến và tầm quan trọng của thuyết trình, đặc biệt trong môi trường giáo dục, việc tìm hiểu về các yếu tố đóng góp vào sự thành công của người thuyết trình là điều cần thiết. Bên cạnh yếu tố giao tiếp phi ngôn ngữ, công cụ hỗ trợ hình ảnh và công nghệ – những yếu tố được công nhận là thành phần không thể thiếu của một bài thuyết trình hiệu quả – các kỹ thuật sử dụng để trình bày ý tưởng và truyền đạt thông tin cũng cần được xem xét. Tại Đại học Lạc Hồng, sinh viên ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh thường xuyên thực hiện thuyết trình trong khuôn khổ một số môn học bắt buộc, cho thấy việc nhận thức và áp dụng các kỹ thuật thuyết trình của sinh viên là rất cần thiết. Một khảo sát được thực hiện với 110 sinh viên Ngôn ngữ Anh tại Đại học Lạc Hồng, sử dụng bảng câu hỏi mở, quan sát và phỏng vấn, cho thấy sinh viên ít chú ý đến các kỹ thuật thuyết trình, với chỉ một số ít lần ghi nhận việc áp dụng chúng trong các bài thuyết trình của họ. Do đó, việc phát triển các chiến lược nhằm tăng cường nhận thức của sinh viên về các kỹ thuật này và tạo thêm cơ hội để họ thực hành các kỹ thuật trong thuyết trình là điều cần thiết.

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE USE OF TECHNIQUES IN PRESENTATIONS OF LAC HONG UNIVERSITY ENGLISH MAJORS

Nguyen Duc Duy Tan[1*], Dang Thi Thu Hien[2]

[1]*Lac Hong University, 10 Huynh Van Nghe, Buu Long ward, Bien Hoa, Dong Nai*
[2]*Nguyen Khuyen High school, Thong Nhat ward, Bien Hoa, Dong Nai*
[*]*Corresponding author: duytan@lhu.edu.vn*

ABSTRACT

Given the growing prevalence and importance of presentations, particularly in educational contexts, it is essential to explore the factors that contribute to the success of a speaker. In addition to non-verbal communication, visual aids, and technological tools – commonly acknowledged as integral components of effective presentations— the techniques used to demonstrate ideas and deliver information should also be considered. At Lac Hong University, English majors frequently engage in presentations as part of several courses, where the application of presentation techniques plays a pivotal role in enhancing comprehension and retention. A survey conducted with 110 English Language students at Lac Hong University, utilizing open-ended questionnaires, observations, and interviews, revealed that students exhibited limited attention to presentation techniques, with only occasional evidence of their application in student presentations. Therefore, it is important to develop strategies that increase students' awareness of these techniques and provide more opportunities for them to practice their use in presentations.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been an enormous attention to the acquisition and application of '21st century skills' defined as the abilities, knowledge, and character traits that are considered essential for the success in the modern, digital, and globally interconnected world. Of the skills that provoke great concern, presentation skill is recognised as indispensable especially in the social sciences area [1] as the formal exchanges of information and ideas occur frequently and across diverse contexts not only in the educational setting but also in various professional situations.

In Vietnam, the importance of presentation skills has been increasingly emphasized across educational institutions. Schools have adopted innovative teaching and learning practices to foster students' learning autonomy by regularly assigning tasks and projects with specific deadlines. This emphasis is evident in the integration of presentation abilities into program learning outcomes. At Lac Hong University (LHU), the Faculty of English Language has implemented an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) program for English majors, designed to equip students with English proficiency and skills that enhance their employability in business and organizational settings. Given the unique characteristics of a language program and the stringent requirements of the modern labor market, the academic management board has incorporated the ability to effectively communicate ideas verbally, non-verbally, and visually into the program's learning outcomes. This has led to the inclusion of presentation components in the teaching, learning, and assessment of various subjects, such as British and American Studies, English for Marketing, English for Business Management, Study Skills, and Office Skills, etc. This implies that, in addition to practicing the English language, students are expected to convey a specific amount of professional information to their instructors and peers, extending beyond the mere fulfillment of assigned tasks. In essence, during presentations, students assume the role of 'experts,' tasked with expanding their peers' knowledge through the information they present. This raises concerns among teachers regarding the efficiency of students' delivery, let alone the effective use of visual aids and digital tools. This observation highlights the critical need for an investigation into students' awareness of how information should be presented and application of certain techniques to enhance presentation effectiveness and address these challenges.

The aim of this research is to help LHU English majors to be better aware of their use of powerful presentation techniques, whereby be more encouraged in making good use of those techniques to have more attractive and comprehensible delivery. This also gives academic staff a view on this issue so that adjustment to teaching content and method could be carried out. This research should be done especially in this difficult time when presentations are still a requirement and online learning has been replacing direct meetings. Without knowing clearly about how well presentations are being exploited, LHU English majors may find it no necessity to make changes. This research acts as an answer whether presentation techniques should be taken into greater consideration or not.

2. CONTENT

2.1 Literature Review

Presentation techniques and their significance

Presentation techniques are strategies that assist presenters in delivering information in more engaging and impactful ways [2]. These techniques significantly influence the audience's retention of information because, as noted, *"if your listeners are in the right frame of mind for a particular topic, you will have a better chance of communicating your ideas and concerns to them, and this can be established both in the introduction and during the presentation."* Effective presentations should appeal to the emotions of the audience, generate both entertaining and persuasive power, and facilitate the transfer of information into the audience's knowledge base. Therefore, presenters should consistently aim to stylize their language and communication. The following are commonly recommended presentation techniques found in the literature.

Antithesis or Contrast: [3] defines antithesis as the use of two contrasting ideas, typically expressed as parallel phrases within a single sentence. The purpose of this technique is to sharpen the focus of an idea by positioning one piece of information as the background for the other, thereby enhancing its emphasis. This technique is often employed for persuasive purposes and the introduction of new concepts.

Repetition and Parallelism: As suggested by [3], repetition involves the successive use of a word or phrase, while parallelism refers to the repetition of similar structures in a series of ideas. Repetition is an effective method to maintain the audience's attention, increase the pace, and build psychological momentum, thereby improving memorization and comprehension. Repetition can occur at multiple points during a presentation, and an especially notable phrase may be repeated throughout, referred to as a "mantra" [3].

Rule of Three: [3] describes the rule of three as based on the idea that groups of three are inherently more enjoyable, fulfilling, or effective than any other number. Information presented in groups of three is more likely to be remembered, whether delivered orally or in writing. This concept, originating from ancient Greek rhetoric, remains relevant today, particularly in digital content. Additionally, presenting information in threes imparts a sense of completeness, thereby enhancing its persuasive power [4].

Rhetorical Questions: Rhetorical questions are posed without the expectation of an answer but serve as a device to link two ideas or points. Similar to other transitional tools, this technique creates space for the audience to focus on the forthcoming point [3, 4].

Storytelling: Storytelling is a powerful technique in presentations, as it aligns with the brain's natural preference for narrative structures, such as schemas, scripts, and

cognitive maps. Stories help individuals process and make sense of the world, including business concepts. This inherent appeal of narrative can influence decision-making and persuade others to adopt particular viewpoints. According to [2, 5], storytelling is one of the most effective methods for organizing information in presentations and motivating audiences to take action.

Surprise Addition: In Effective Presentation, [6] describes the "surprise addition" as introducing important information towards the end of a presentation. This additional information, which is not merely a bonus, serves to create an impactful conclusion and increase the presentation's effectiveness.

In his book "Presentation in English", [3] explained that the techniques are vital in enhancing the clarity, engagement, and memorability of a presentation. However, their importance and applicability vary depending on the context. For motivational or persuasive presentations, techniques like repetition, mantras, rhetorical questions, and contrast are crucial for emotional impact and resonance. For technical or formal presentations, the focus might shift toward examples, structure (Rule of Three), and precision over rhetorical flair. While not all techniques are vital in every presentation, understanding and strategically applying them can significantly enhance the effectiveness of communication. The key is to adapt these techniques to the presentation's purpose, audience, and context. It could be understood that these techniques are established because they address key challenges presenters face: engaging the audience, simplifying complex information, and making content memorable. Without them, a presentation must rely heavily on other factors, such as the presenter's charisma, the strength of the content, and audience readiness. Also, [2], though did not directly mention presentation techniques, emphasized polishing presentation styles and supporting details as an essential in public speaking. These techniques are not arbitrary; in other words, they are grounded in psychological principles that aid communication, comprehension, and retention. Neglecting them places a heavy burden on the presenter to compensate through other means, such as exceptional storytelling, content, or delivery. Ultimately, the absence of these techniques does not guarantee failure, but their presence significantly increases the likelihood of a presentation's success.

Research on presentation performance in the educational setting

In the Vietnamese context, several studies have assessed the effectiveness of students' presentation skills in educational settings. [7] observed that students exhibited high levels of engagement with presentation tasks, excelling in information research and visual presentation using tools like PowerPoint. These students frequently created well-designed visual aids, which were considered essential for effective oral presentations. Similarly, [8] noted that students placed considerable emphasis on the design and inclusion of visual aids during their preparation.

However, several weaknesses were also identified. [7,9] reported that graduates often lacked confidence and coherence during presentations, particularly when delivering content in foreign languages such as English. Furthermore, students were found to have limited communication skills, including deficiencies in verbal communication and other generic skills [8]. Regarding students' self-assessment of their presentation skills, [10] found that students were capable of organizing their presentation content, adjusting themselves, rehearsing, and selecting appropriate techniques. However, despite adequate preparation, students struggled with managing unpredictable situations during performances, particularly with maintaining tone, eye contact, and managing anxiety. In a study on oral presentation difficulties at Lac Hong University, [11] identified students' primary concerns as issues with slides, time management, mental pressure, handling questions, lack of subject knowledge, audience engagement, and language barriers.

Research on students' presentation skills has predominantly focused on general perceptions, despite the presence of some detailed findings. While such studies have provided conclusions on oral communication abilities in general and presentation skills in particular, they have also highlighted key concerns among students. These concerns primarily relate to content organization, visual preparation, and language use. However, limited attention has been given to presentation styles and techniques, which have not been thoroughly described or analyzed. In the case of a study conducted with English language majors at Lac Hong University, it was observed that students expressed concerns about maintaining the audience's attention during presentations. However, the findings were presented in broad terms, derived primarily from student surveys. This highlights the need for further investigation using more practical methods, such as observation and interviews, to provide a more detailed reflection of reality and to uncover students' experiences in depth.

It should be noticed that presentation skills are, in many cases, under investigations from broad perspectives, exploring the general performances and effectiveness of various elements such as non-verbal language, body language and visual aids, etc. The notion of presentation techniques with their undeniable advantages to presentation performance does not seemingly exhibit its dominance in the literature, despite their role in enhancing the effectiveness of information delivery as explained above; therefore, investigations into presentation techniques in order to clearly identify the reality of presentation preparation and delivery of students at college levels, whereby making recommendations to improve the situation.

This research is to answer the following questions:

1) What is students' approach in giving presentations?

2) How frequently do students make use of presentation techniques in the delivery?

2.2 Methodology

A qualitative approach, together with an extent of quantitative information, was used to conduct this study aiding in the rapid discovery of important information by seeing items and investigating their properties using descriptions rather than numerical displays [12]. Another rationale for adopting qualitative research was that it was conducted on a small scale; more precisely, it focused on the community of students at The Faculty of English Language, which was not transferable to a larger group of students such as Lac Hong University students. The entire research study was designed as a survey with qualitative observation included as a reflection of attitudes, preferences and opinions of people taking part in [13]. Within the context of this research, a survey design helped clarify how participants perceived presentation in general and some techniques commonly used practically through data collected from a variety of instruments. A survey is not associated with questionnaires only, but is *an umbrella term which allows for many data collection procedures including questionnaires, interviews and observations* [14].

The population for this study comprised 200 English Language majors from the Faculty of English Language at Lac Hong University. These students had not undergone formal training in presentation skills but had been regularly assigned presentation tasks in recent academic semesters. The study employed non-probability sampling, specifically convenience sampling, as described by [14]. This method involved selecting participants manually without the use of technological tools. The sample size consisted of 110 students, including 51 from the 2021 cohort and 59 from the 2022 cohort. The slight difference in sample size was deemed inconsequential, as the students exhibited similar characteristics and experiences in presentation tasks. Adhering to the principle of triangulation in scientific research, three distinct data collection methods were utilized to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. The first instrument was a structured questionnaire containing open-ended questions designed to gather in-depth information about participants' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: (1) general perceptions of presentations, including definitions, purposes, and methods; (2) specific activities related to preparation and delivery of presentations; and (3) the use of presentation techniques. The questions focused on the students' own experience in conducting presentations, which helped generalize their perception on presentation with a variety of respects. Such questions which directly asked for expected data as "Did you apply the rule of three?" were not in use; instead, the researcher asked questions like "How can you ensure the sufficiency of information to a point?" or "How much information to a point made it sound complete? Quantify it." The questions were formulated based on the research objectives, which aimed to investigate students' perceptions of presentations. More specifically, they were grounded in well-established theories regarding the purposes of presentations, characteristics of effective presentations, and the recommended processes for preparation and delivery. Using thematic analysis to categorize responses, identify patterns, trends and key insights, this approach was intended to elicit detailed responses, which would subsequently be categorized and synthesized to identify broader patterns and generalizations. The second method was observation, a widely recognized qualitative research tool that enables the collection of detailed, first-hand data within a specific context [15]. Researcher observed 20 presentations from four different classes – two from the 2021 cohort and two from the 2022 cohort – while acting as complete observers, refraining from interfering with student activities. A pre-designed checklist with defined categories and space for additional notes was used to record observations systematically. The checklist included items which could reflect students' common activities during their presentation time, e.g. speaking from notes / slides, moving slides, exhibiting hand gestures, etc. However, the primary phenomena to be observed were the common presentation techniques spotted in the students' performances, with additional information such as topic presented, presentation section, time, and frequency, etc. so that more in-depth analysis into the application of presentation techniques could be carried out. The third instrument involved interviews, categorized into three sets. The first set consisted of interviews with 20 students (five from each observed class), aimed at gaining deeper insights into the data collected through questionnaires and observations. The second set included interviews with four faculty members who were responsible for assigning and overseeing presentation tasks in the observed classes. The final set of interviews was conducted post-observation with selected students who demonstrated notable use of presentation techniques, as identified during the observation phase. These interviews provided additional context and clarification regarding the observed behaviours and practices. The questions used in those interview were open-ended, which were directly asked by the researcher who did the note-taking from the participants' responses. The interview was conducted to each interviewee at a time so that they did not interfere others' responses so that collected ideas could be more of no bias.

2.3 Findings

2.3.1 Students' approach in giving presentations (data from questionnaire and interview)

The preparation process is reported to be time-consuming and involves a series of activities. Specifically, students typically spent an average of two weeks preparing all necessary materials for the presentation day. Topics were usually assigned at the beginning of the semester, with student presentations scheduled on a weekly basis. The preparation phase encompassed a variety of activities, with the most frequent ones identified through observation and questionnaire data.

Table 1. *Tasks done in the preparation stage*

Tasks	No. of students	Specific activities (as mentioned in the interviews
Information search	110	• Online searches • Reading • Consultancy
Slide design	110	• Making PowerPoint slides • Finding pictures and videos • Making charts and graphs
Information learning	110	• Learning information by heart
Language check	78	• Writing scripts • Correcting grammar and pronunciation
Interactive game design	34	• Organizing games and activities • Writing questions to ask the audience • Preparing rewards

While FEL students generally understood the purpose of presentations, their preparation activities primarily focused on meeting the requirements set by instructors, such as content sufficiency, visual quality, and language accuracy. There was minimal attention given to how the audience would engage with and absorb the delivered information. Specifically, despite the time spent on research and the volume of content included, little effort was made to enhance the content's impact or visibility, even for key points. The information was merely compiled, with the primary concern being its appropriateness and relevance. As a result, presentation techniques were seldom considered, likely due to the students' limited exposure to these aspects and their strong focus on meeting assessment criteria.

Table 2. *Tasks done in the delivery stage*

Tasks	No. of students	Specific activities (as mentioned in the interviews
Verbal delivery	110	• Speaking • Referring to notes and slides
Visual control	110	• Showing visuals • Explaining visuals
Language control	110	• Correcting • Searching vocabulary
Body language	87	• Gesturing • Moving • Showing facial expressions
Interactions	34	• Asking questions • Conducting prepared games

As shown in Table 2, the presentation delivery time was occupied by a range of activities carried out by the students. Following the preparation stage, which involved minimal attention to the strategic use of presentation techniques, the delivery phase was primarily focused on fulfilling the assigned presentation tasks. Students devoted their full attention to the verbal delivery of information, managing PowerPoint slides, and ensuring the accuracy of the English language. In contrast, less attention was given to body language and audience interaction. The use of effective presentation techniques designed to enhance audience retention and comprehension was neither clearly observed nor explicitly mentioned in the questionnaire or interview responses.

2.3.2 A closer look at presentation techniques observed (data from observation and interview)

A number of students demonstrated the use of certain presentation techniques; however, these occurrences were sporadic and not consistent. As a result, the activities of preparing presentations and employing specific techniques were not among the most frequently observed behaviours during the data collection process. Generally, the concept of "powerful presentation techniques" was unfamiliar to most students. Many reported that they had either never heard of the term or possessed only a limited understanding of it, lacking awareness of how such techniques function and how to implement them intentionally. The reasons for the use of these techniques, despite students' lack of prior knowledge, were relatively consistent and could be categorized into two primary explanations. First, students often employed techniques out of a personal intention to emphasize key points or clarify complex issues. They tended to allocate more time to such content and provided additional explanations to ensure understanding. This behaviour was frequently linked to individual personalities and communication styles, as some students expressed a natural inclination to elaborate on content to make it more engaging. Second, students were influenced by exposure to professional speakers on social media platforms such as Facebook Watch, YouTube, and TikTok. Observing these speakers inspired students to emulate their delivery methods, even if they were unaware of the underlying techniques being employed. Despite their limited prior knowledge, students showed attentiveness and recognized distinctive elements of effective presentations.

Although the application of powerful presentation techniques was inconsistent and students were largely unaware of their intentional use, researchers identified the top five techniques most frequently employed, as observed during the study.

Table 3. *Most frequently performed techniques*

Ranking	Activities considered to be presentation techniques
1	Rhetorical question
2	Comparison and contrast
3	Story
4	Rule of three
5	Repetition

The first technique observed was the use of rhetorical questions. In some presentations, students posed short, simple questions at various points during their talks, though these questions did not require responses from the audience. As noted, students typically employed rhetorical questions to signal a transition from one topic to the next. In this context, rhetorical questions served primarily as a tool for connecting ideas. Additionally, these questions were often preceded by a brief pause, which enhanced vocal emphasis and captured the audience's attention more effectively. Among the rhetorical questions used, *"How about...?"* was the most frequently employed. Teachers confirmed the prevalence of this technique, noting that students often substituted transitional expressions, typically suggested in lesson materials, with rhetorical questions. In group presentations, students used rhetorical questions to introduce new sections or to hand over the presentation to a teammate, according to faculty observations. Furthermore, the application of rhetorical questions was consistent across diverse topics, including personal experiences (e.g., habits in the past or memorable trips in Speaking 3) and professional subjects (e.g., product introductions or marketing campaigns in Business Reading 2). This consistency suggests that the topic of the presentation does not significantly influence the use of rhetorical questions.

The second technique, comparison and contrast, was less frequently employed than rhetorical questions, primarily because it required more in-depth research. Nevertheless, it ranked among the top techniques, as students mentioned its use during questionnaires and interviews. This technique involved describing similarities or differences between elements, and its frequency varied between cohorts. For instance, students in the 2022 cohort used this technique less often than those in the 2021 cohort, not due to age differences but rather due to the nature of the topics assigned. Familiar topics, such as friendship, vacations, or past stories in Speaking 3, saw limited use of comparison and contrast. In contrast, presentations with persuasive objectives, such as product advertising or project proposals in Business Speaking and Business Reading, incorporated this technique more often. These findings suggest that the application of comparison and contrast depends significantly on the complexity of the topic and the presentation's purpose.

Storytelling was another technique observed, though its application was less frequent compared to rhetorical questions and comparison and contrast. Out of twenty presentations, only three incorporated storytelling, excluding those presentations centered entirely on narrative content. This observation aligns with teacher feedback, where only one interviewee reported that their students used storytelling in their presentations. Other teachers highlighted that storytelling is a challenging skill, leading many students to avoid it. Some students acknowledged the effectiveness of storytelling but noted its time-consuming nature, stating that it required memorizing details, narrating the story, and connecting it back to the main point—tasks they found difficult. One student remarked, *"You have to remember the story details, then tell it all to your friends and finally refer back to the point. It's too hard, actually."*

The rule of three was another technique observed in students' presentations. Teachers reported instances where students used structures such as "A, B, and C," particularly when listing items or describing using adjectives. However, the use of this technique was limited, similar to storytelling. Due to the small number of cases, it remains inconclusive whether the choice of presentation topics influences the application of the rule of three. Responses from questionnaires and interviews did not explicitly mention this technique, although some students speculated about its effectiveness, with comments like *"I'm thinking about how much information is enough"* or *"I don't know, but it seems number three is a perfect number, just like the Holy Trinity."* Variations of the rule of three, such as "A, and B or C" or "A or B or C," were occasionally observed. However, instances of the rule of three at levels beyond words, such as arguments or advice, were absent. For example, students typically provided two reasons for an argument or four to five pieces of advice, suggesting a missed opportunity to utilize the technique more consistently.

The final technique identified among the top five was repetition. While repetition was commonly observed during presentations, many instances involved "clumsy repetition," where students repeated words to buy time while searching for others. These instances were not considered a valid technique, as they detracted from fluency and had no positive impact on information delivery. Teachers also criticized such repetitions, describing them as disruptive to the flow of presentations. On the other hand, deliberate repetition of certain adverbs or phrases was noted, such as "really, really efficient," "very, very comfortable," or "so, so much." Despite its potential as a technique, repetition was not explicitly recognized by students during questionnaires or interviews as a helpful strategy in their presentations.

The activities discussed above are widely recognized as effective techniques commonly employed in presentations. However, in the case of English-major students at LHU, despite substantial time and effort devoted to preparation, limited attention is given to the purposeful application of these techniques to enhance presentation efficiency. Evidence suggests that only a small proportion of students,

acting as speakers, reflected on how effectively their presentations contributed to achieving the objective of enhancing the audience's knowledge. While some students demonstrated awareness of these techniques, their implementation was generally inconsistent and often unconscious. The findings of this study effectively addressed the two research questions concerning students' perceptions of presentations and the frequency of technique usage. Nevertheless, the low frequency and inconsistent application of these techniques posed challenges in identifying specific factors influencing their selection and use. The exception lies in the influence of topic areas, which appear to play a notable role in determining the choice and application of presentation techniques.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the finding that students lack comprehensive knowledge of presentation techniques yet unconsciously apply them highlights the necessity for professional training in this area. Equipping students with a structured understanding of effective presentation techniques will enable them to utilize these strategies intentionally and with greater impact. Future research should focus on identifying the factors that influence students' selection of techniques when they are applied purposefully, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of these techniques in enhancing the overall quality of their presentations. Such investigations could provide valuable insights into optimizing educational practices and improving students' communication skills in academic and professional contexts.

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