

THE OPENINGS AND ENDINGS OF STUDENTS' SPOKEN ACADEMIC
PRESENTATIONS

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*To my beloved parents, husband and families
for their Love, Prayer and Support*

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“In the name of ALLAH, the Most Gracious and Most Merciful”

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ABSTRACT

Oral Academic Presentation is one of the formal speaking activities done in the classroom whether in group or individually for the academic and professional purposes among tertiary level of students. The majority of the students seem to have problems in terms of language aspect and the organizational pattern of the presentations. The goal of this study was to observe on the students' oral academic presentation emphasizing on the way students used to begin and end the academic presentations in Communicative English classroom. This study aims to examine the way students handle the group presentations in opening and ending the presentation and also the linguistic difficulties encountered by students. The analysis has been done on the 75 corpus gathered from 20 academic groups presentations among semester three and five students at Polytechnic in Kuantan. The group presentations were audio recorded for four hours, two minutes and 41 seconds consisted of 17159 words. The presentations text were transcribed in *Word* document and tagged manually according to the area of this study. The findings revealed that the majority of students have major problem in linguistic difficulties which are due to the avoidance of several important elements in the presentation: lack of transitional-markers used at the beginnings and endings the presentations to produce a cohesive and organized presentation. It suggests that the students need to be scaffolded in order to improve the language use in the presentation. Thus, a few suggestions have been suggested from the findings focusing on the role of lecturers in providing sufficient guidelines for organizing oral academic presentations for student.

ABSTRAK

Pembentangan Akademik Secara Lisan merupakan salah satu aktiviti lisan yang dijalankan di dalam kelas sama ada secara berkumpulan ataupun individu untuk tujuan akademik dan profesional dalam kalangan pelajar di peringkat tinggi. Kebanyakan pelajar bermasalah dari aspek linguistik dan penyusunan struktur pembentangan. Kajian ini dijalankan untuk memerhatikan cara para pelajar untuk memulakan dan mengakhiri pembentangan akademik di dalam kelas. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menilai cara mengendalikan pembentangan berkumpulan dan permasalahan linguistik dalam kalangan pelajar. Analisis ke atas 75 korpus yang dikumpulkan daripada 20 kumpulan pembentangan oleh pelajar semester tiga dan lima di Politeknik Kuantan dijalankan untuk mendapatkan data. Pembentangan ini telah di rakam secara audio selama empat jam dua minit 41 saat dan mengandungi 17159 patah perkataan. Teks pembentangan disalin ke dalam dokumen *Word* dan di *tag* secara manual. Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa para pelajar mempunyai masalah utama dalam aspek linguistik. Perkara ini disebabkan oleh pengabaian beberapa elemen penting dalam pembentangan; kurang menggunakan *transitional-markers* dalam pembentangan di permulaan dan pengakhiran proses pembentangan untuk menghasilkan pembentangan yang kemas dan tersusun. Ini menunjukkan bahawa para pelajar perlu dibimbing bagi mempertingkatkan kemahiran berbahasa dalam pembentangan. Para pensyarah juga perlu memainkan peranan dalam penyediaan garis panduan yang mencukupi bagi meningkatkan penyusunan dalam pembentangan akademik secara lisan dikalangan pelajar.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Education has been the most crucial factor especially in formal diffusion of English around the world. English symbolize learners' aspirations for quality in education and somehow plays a major role in the field of communication globally. An understanding towards English language is the most important contributing factor of access to higher education, employment possibilities and social opportunities. In Malaysia, the higher institution such as polytechnic is responsible in producing potential graduates with the sufficient employable skills in order to prepare students for the job market in future.

The compulsory English subject Communicative English are taught to all students in polytechnics which emphasis on the speaking or communication skills that provide students with 'discourse community' that can prepare them for the communicative demands in their future workplace. As for the credit hours, Communicative English subject is taught within 15 weeks of instructional duration or 45 hours including 30 hours practical and 15 hours lecture per semester.

These subjects are designed purposely to equip students in learning the way of using the language especially in the industry because English language is one of the medium used in effective communication. Learning adequate language knowledge especially in English is unavoidable in the present scenario to polytechnic students because they have to get ready with employable skills to prepare them for their future career. According to the syllabus of Communicative English 3 and 5 taught in polytechnics, the assessments planned for this subject are mostly on Oral Academic Presentation (OAP).

The majority of the students found that OAP is the most essential skill needed for their academic and professional purposes, and the most difficult oral communication skills to acquire. OAP is planned in order to increase the level of understanding and transparency in oral communication as one of the formal activities done in the classroom whether in group or individually. In addition, OAP exposes students with a valuable experience that allows them to understand the process of integrating the input from their reading, observations or from what they had listened to share with the audience effectively.

This study aims to look at one side of the syllabus focusing on the spoken corpus in the students' oral academic presentation (OAP) emphasize on the way the students used to start and ended the academic presentation in the Communicative English classroom.

1.1 Background of the Study

The purposes of designing English language syllabus in polytechnic under the supports of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) Malaysia is to equip students with adequate skills in academic and technical skills, so that they are able to use the language and perform well in the real industry setting. According to the syllabus in the Communicative English, students need to deal with spoken English as well as written English. They need to listen and understand spoken language; read and understand written language because in order to be a good user of English, they have to master all the four language skills which are reading, listening, speaking and writing.

In the Malaysian Polytechnic education system, Communicative English (CE) is taught for three semesters for diploma courses. The course content for CE prepares students with study skill, information processing skill, reading skill, and oral communication skill. Other skills in CE modules are description of product and services in semester three and writing resume and cover letter for semester five. These skills will initially be required during a mandatory one-semester industrial attachment programme with either government agencies or private organizations.

The students are tested on 60 per cent of the assessment on the performance in OAP and the other 40 per cent on the written test and listening test in their continuous assessments. Most of the lecturers do not explain more on the presentation skills in the lecture, they only focuses on the speaking skill which is more on general input on the expression used in daily activities and the suitable responds towards the language used. Little consideration is given to the form and function of the language that they should do in the OAP, so most of the students are not prepared linguistically in terms of useful expressions.

Normally, lecturers will focus on the general aspect of presentation which is on the requirement of the task and do not provide the students with adequate language focus. Even though they realize that language focus should be exposed more to the students in learning language, they need to comply with the content provided in the syllabus where it emphasizes more on the task requirements. The process of developing the syllabus and content of the module has been done by a group of skilful lecturers in every polytechnic where they have to sit together and discuss in improving the syllabus from time to time by referring to the syllabus provided by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE).

The problem is that the students are not provided with standard modules and it becomes more crucial because the majority of students who come to polytechnics have low intermediate level of English proficiency. Based on their SPM English Language result, most of them only earned C, D and E grades. If they are not given proper language input that they can refer to which emphasizes on the appropriate language and presentation organization in OAP they will face with all the problem to organize the presentation and also when using formal language during the presentation.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the observation done, many students in polytechnics have a difficulty in speaking skills compared to writing, especially in oral presentation whether in public speaking or an oral academic presentation. Unfortunately for them, the module that is currently being used does not sufficiently prepare the students for spoken academic presentation. Several glaring mistakes and weakness can be seen in the presentation process where the students wrongly do the introduction part, left out transitioning signals when linking the ideas and abruptly end the presentation. These situations draw the attention to find and provide better

teaching and learning materials that meet the need of the students. Thus, they found that speaking is harder because they have to perform their thoughts in different settings live in front of the public during the oral presentation.

In this study, the major focus will be on the academic presentation because most of students do not know the right way to begin and end the presentations and also have limited understanding in using the language formally in academic presentations. This study aims to look at the organization of the academic presentations and the mistake done by students in order to come out with the solution at the end of this study. This problem needs to be highlighted in order to improve the weaknesses among students in academic presentations and to provide language and presentations skills for students in the specific purposes.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate polytechnics students' academic presentations especially when they open and end their academic presentation. The focus of this study is also to gain information on the problem that the students have when they want to start the presentation and end the presentation and also to come out with a few solutions to overcome the problem.

1.4 Objective of the Study

The aims of this study were:

- a) To investigate the way in which students handle group presentations in Communicative English class.
- b) To investigate the way in which students open and end their oral academic presentations.
- c) To identify the linguistic difficulties faced by students during spoken group academic presentations.

1.5 Research Question

The purpose of this study was to seek several answers to the following research questions:

- a) How do students handle group presentations in Communicative English class?
- b) How do students open and end their spoken academic oral presentations?
- c) What are common linguistic difficulties faced by students during spoken group academic presentation?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant to both learners and lecturer in order to improve the way of teaching among lecturers and provide certain approach that can be used in the classroom to help the students in the process of learning. Most of the students in polytechnic have limited English proficiency (LEP) background and this reason has caused few problems and difficulties in the oral presentations. Hence, this study is significant in providing few suggestions to scaffold the LEP learners. Moreover, most of the corpus study focused on the written corpus for conferences, and lecture, but less is done on the spoken corpus especially on oral academic presentation.

So, the study will also give wide overview on learner corpus and that will be a rich resource for teaching learning purposes because evidence and analysis gained from this research will be able to guide educators, curriculum developers or material designers in order to improve the content of the English subject for polytechnics students. Since polytechnics' English teaching modules are centralized, the pedagogical implications stemming for the result of this study can be shared with other polytechnics. This study is also significant because as far as I know, there has yet to have a collection of spoken learner corpus in Malaysia, and the one that they have are mostly on written corpus but not on spoken corpus. It also will be beneficial for the other researchers who possess the same intention of doing spoken corpus on oral academic presentation.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study concentrates on students performing oral academic presentations for their Communicative English classes at the polytechnic level. The students are learners of general academic English with low intermediate level of English proficiency. The study focuses on the nature of the students' performance on how the students organize the presentation and how they begin and end the presentation. Based on the rubrics of the oral presentation, there are certain criteria that they have to follow in order to fulfil the requirements of organizing the presentation orderly. Finally, the study will identify the organizational patterns in OAP used by the students which include three major sections in the presentation which are an introduction, body and conclusion. While the introduction and conclusion might be similar for all types of oral academic presentation but the organization of the body may differ.

1.8 Limitation of the Study

This study is conducted in Politeknik Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah, Kuantan on 75 students who were divided into 20 groups. The students have been selected randomly and the data obtained were in the form of recorded presentations. There were about two to six students in each group and the duration of each of the presentation was about 15-20 minutes done in the classroom. The average time of presentations and division of tasks among students differ based on the number of group members.

1.9 Definition of Terms

1.9.1 Learner Corpus

Corpus study means a study which needs the researcher to gather the authentic data produced by L2 learners from a wide variety of sources and then organize the input in a database created for linguistic research. With regards to this study, the authentic data collected from the students' oral presentation in the classroom have been gathered and stored in corpora. In order to provide with some guidance for the students especially in improving the presentation skills, corpus-based study is needed with the purpose of providing them with special textbooks or module as the tools or learning material.

1.9.2 Oral Academic Presentation

Oral Academic Presentation (OAP) is one of the classroom speech events which requires the students to engage in the academic discourse through ongoing negotiations with instructor and peers. This activity is a process that will train the students to be proficient in an academic activity which is demanded for different purposes. As for this study, oral academic presentation is one of the required assessments that the students must do in Communicative English Classroom from first semester until fifth semester. The activity includes the other academic speech events for example group discussion, role play, face to face interview, and mini project presentation.

1.9.3 Organizational Discourse Pattern

Presentation involves a well-structured content and also good planning and organization. This study focuses more on the organization of the oral academic presentation and turn taking in order to make sure that the flow of the presentation will be smooth and clear. Formal communication activity like this involves not only transmitting information orally. It involves certain skills which required conveying the main point with supported points within clear and logical structure. So, organizational markers or discourse markers need to be highlighted in order to produce a good piece of presentation.

1.10 Conclusion

The reviews on the background of the study, statement of problem, purpose and objective of this study and also 3 research questions in related to the objective of the present study were done in this chapter. A thorough discussion of literature review will be discussed in the next chapter.

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