

Presentation as Employability Soft Skill to ESP Learners in the English Language Institute at King Abdulaziz University

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Abstract—This paper recasts the notion of soft skills and the importance of these skills in the success of professional career to ESP learners. As a matter of fact, it offers a great deal of understanding of the concept of soft skills, employability and communication. In addition, it proposes much attention to presentation as being a communication tool to ESP learners to achieve employability in many professions. Whereas communication is the foundation for most skills, presentation acts as the tool to facilitate communication to be delivered in an appropriate way. Moreover, the paper covers a number of challenges that faces ESP learners in presentation and some effective solutions to overcome difficulties that they might encounter. While the intended aim is to get employed, the researcher argues that mastering soft skills in general and presentation in specific is essential to ESP learners to perform wonderfully in any sector. Nevertheless, it will help greatly in the production of society. By the same token, it shed lights on the most appropriate strategies approached to attain a beneficial and professional presentation every time. Finally, a suggested training program for English Language Institute (hereafter ELI) learners at King Abdul Aziz University on presentation is proposed by the researcher to help learners acquire presentation skill.

Index Terms—soft skills, employability, communication, presentation

I. INTRODUCTION

As the need to utilize the English Language is pressing and becoming really important, the need for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is urging as well. Moreover, having the minimum requirements of the language is not enough anymore. One must seek for self development in a world of challenges (Cited in:Schulz, 2008). Everyone is born with innate skills that enable her/him to manage the specific field s/he is working in; however, these skills need shaping, reshaping and refurbishing in most cases with training. In other words, is to put these skills into action so as to be productive in any society. In order to achieve success in ESP one must acquire some crucial skills especially to be employed. As a matter of fact, English language learners for general and ESP learners in particular need some skills, not only when it comes to hard (technical) skills but also, soft skills that are important to employability in order, to survive in a dynamic era of professionalism.

This paper focuses on communication skills that geared and directed to ESP learners and employees specific careers, in general and presentation in particular which they need the most. Communication skills, without a doubt is the most common and critical among other skills. Many undergraduate, graduates and even employees lack the skill to communicate effectively thought it is essential in every field with no exception. Communication skills are considered as the bases for many other soft skills as they are prerequisites in many cases, they fall into many types such as language proficiency, behavior, conversation and presentation; however, the most approached and desired one is presentation (Schulz, 2008). Unfortunately, ESP learners continually face a dilemma using this skill, which they need mostly in their professional life. The paper tackles an important topic; first, it presents and discusses the importance and definitions of soft skills and employability. Next, it highlights some of the most challenges that ESP learners encounter as a result of the lack in acquiring soft skills. Following, some solutions are proposed to overcome shortfalls in skills. Moreover, an elaboration on presentation for ESP, shedding light on the importance and significance of mastering this skill and the implications that may be applied of some of the most efficient strategies toward successfulness will be displayed. Finally, a training program is suggested by the researcher for ELI learners at King Abdul Aziz University.

II. SOFT SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY

To have a clear view of important notions discussed in this paper, it would be of a great help to define some key terms that are frequently used according to research papers and other resources related to the topic. First, soft skills can be defined as "those skills that influence how we interact with people". Those skills could be the ability to communicate,

have qualities of leadership, team building, career, planning, marketing, public speaking... etc (Giusti, 2008, p. 1). They depend on the context which is being applied in. In 2007, Calla Ram listed 60 types of soft skills that are valuable in work and learning domains, they include communication skills, critical and structural thinking, problem solving skills, creativity, negotiation skills, teamwork, capability, self management, cultural awareness, sociability, project manager... etc. It cannot be determined that one skill is more important than another; all in general are beneficial in career development (Schulz, 2008). Therefore, it is fair to say that communication skills also include active listening, writing, speaking and presentation where they are indeed vital. Some professions are aware of the importance of soft skills more than others. For example as Giusti mentioned that legal profession has awareness about soft skills in recent years (Giusti, 2008).

While soft skills influence learners' interaction with others, employability skills as Confederation of British Industry magazine (2013) defines it as "the skills that attribute and help people respond to the changing demands of the workplace and contribute positively to their employer's success" (Cited in: Ito, 2014). It has been noted by Andrews, Russell (2012), Burrows and Wragg (2012) that employability skills can be identified as self-management, team working, business and customer awareness, and problem solving. However, Wagner believes that there are seven employability skills which every ESP learner should be acquainted with those are: "critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration across networks and learning by influence, agility and adaptability, initiative and entrepreneurialism, effective oral and written communication, accessing, analyzing information, curiosity and imagination" (Ito, 2014, p. 2). Obviously, those skills are mostly needed for any learner with different levels of applications. Additionally, Leroux and Lafleur believe that educational industry should keep track of the changes happening in order to assist learners with new market knowledge (Leroux & Lafleur, 1995). This is true for every sector that rapidly changing; therefore, learners must be updated continuously.

A. *The Importance of Soft Skills*

As soft skills are important for all ESP learners whatever their specialties, they differ in the range of their importance in which what could be useful for one major might not serve in the same level to another major. The importance and necessity of soft skills are drawn from the job-market's competitiveness. It is widely known that candidates with distinct skills are more preferable for they are more productive wherever they are employed (Schulz, 2008). However, denial and ignorance of the importance of these skills will definitely result in holding one back in their professional career in the future (Giusti, 2008). Hence, such skills are usually sought by employers which make those skills an essential quality in many ESP learners and employers "as it became the tool in the global employment scenario" (Neela, 2011, p. 65). Which means that the higher the position the higher the requirements of skills and that is for the sake of development (Giusti, 2008). In other words, soft skills and career growth are interrelated as one depends directly on the other. One should identify which skill that one needs in both career and social life. Thus, having and developing these skills can empower one's self confidence to face any kind of obstacles, for one can easily show his/her strength, qualities and expertise in action.

B. *Challenges ESP Learners Face in Soft Skills*

Unfortunately, many ESP learners encounter several challenges where they have to work in professional environments that will most probably require "think in the spot" thing, to give presentation or communicate with native speakers. Another challenge is to have the ability to employ the knowledge and skills that they have acquired in institutions or in trainings in their workplace. The Conference Board of Canada, American Society for Training and Development, United States Office of Educational Research and Improvement have emphasized on the importance of teaching soft skills and hard skills in workplaces which is evident in the European society's criteria of employment (Leroux & Lafleur, 1995). Moreover, they have classified The Employability Skills Profile into three divisions:

1. Skills that are needed in academic context such as communication, presentations, critical thinking, problem solving skills... etc.
2. Personal Management skills such as taking personal actions, setting goals, positive attitudes and self-esteem.
3. Team Work Skills including group work, give and take, respect of others and leadership qualities (which also include presentation skill) (Leroux & Lafleur, 1995).

C. *Solutions for Utilizing Skills*

Therefore, it is desirable to include trainings to undergraduate ESP learners to acquire the most important soft skills that are most probably beneficial professionally which could result in better job opportunities. To enhance soft skills in ESP learners and to overcome their deficiency, some institutions offer training sessions as well as e-learning sessions. Many training of soft skills are being spread widely; nevertheless, independent courses have started to emerge for different fields (Lucs, 2014). Moreover, socialization with others is a key factor especially to improve communication competence (Schulz, 2008). Ito reported that among ESP participants, university faculty of law are in need of skills training (Ito, 2014). Proving this, Georgina mentioned that the UKCES (2009) declared that there is a lack in merging skills to meet business learners' needs (Andrews, 2012). Additionally, ESP learners need to incorporate soft skills within ESP programs to be embedded with other skills. Consequently, modification of teaching methodology must be done which will shift the attention to improve learners' abilities in the best way possible. This demands preplanning on

what skill is intended to be improved; thus, rearranging the content to support learning soft skills (Schulz, 2008). King Abdul Aziz University is one of the most qualified universities across the kingdom and worldwide; so, the university is most illegible to offer these kinds of trainings to their ESP learners and faculty members.

III. PRESENTATION

Presentation has been going through rapid changes delivering variable messages throughout the history. Its aim is to communicate effectively and efficiently presenting ideas in a more meaningful respected form. This skill is one of which can be developed and expanded with practice for it polishes ones speaking skill. It has been approached by many ESP learners, language users as TAs and professors in workshops, classrooms, and conferences as well. It develops a number of other skills along the way e.g. public speaking, negotiation and discussion abilities (Boyd, 1989).

In order to give a presentation, one must have predetermined the purpose for the presentation and have also decided on the objectives of it; such as, the reason for the presentation, the intended skills and information. Materials, audience and objective are what specify the type of presentation; for example, it might be to offer training or teaching skills or topic, and sharing information (Chiarelli & Melgar, 2001). It takes two forms; oral and written one that ESP learners need to master to achieve success in both professional and social competence (Schulz, 2008). The researcher displays presentation including training or teaching a skill or topic to ESP learners. The first step is to determine the topic and collect all needed information. Doing so, will result in self confidence as the presenter will be fully acquainted of the topic, after all s/he is the expert. As pointed by Shinn that many Americans experience difficulties in presentation because it requires a public speaking ability that is why most of them suffer from anxiety. Each presentation should contain one main idea, avoiding multiple messages which could distract the audience (Shinn, 2004). As a matter of fact, a presentation should include an introduction on the topic or skill, importance of the subject, explanation supporting it with illustrations and exercises, conclusion of the presentation and lastly suggestions on the topic. To determine the kind of presentation one must acknowledge the audience. While small groups' presentation tends to be more analytic generously providing details; on the contrary, larger groups require more general information to prevent confusion which might occur in the discussion part. In addition, many presenters do not know what to include in a presentation and what to exclude; therefore, it is ought to mention that in order to have an effective and focused presentation, one should include key points such as statistics, facts and other data. Also, it should consist of definitions of the most frequently repeated and important terms, supposing that the audience knows nothing about the subject; however, one must try to reduce the use of technical terms as to have a comprehensible presentation (Chiarelli & Melgar, 2001). A conclusion is preferable to close the session recapping main points mentioned in the presentation. This is very crucial for ESP learners for they need a summary to spotlight important ideas. Moreover, time should be managed; longer presentation sessions should be interrupted with a break. Equally important is dividing time according to the most important aspect in the presentation to the least important. Nevertheless, the participation of the audience can make the presentation lively active saving it from becoming dull and lecture like (Shinn, 2004).

Comparatively, a presenter should know his/her audience, their experiences, expectations of the presentation and prior knowledge on the subject. As Shinn mentioned that knowing more specified information about the audience such as age, gender, experience, field of expertise and profession could help in formulating a successful targeted presentation (Shinn, 2004). In this case, it is also important to realize and accept controversial points of view, attitudes and prior knowledge of the audience. A key point of perfection in presentations is practice, either in front of a mirror or in front of anybody which will result in easing any anxiety feeling. Moreover, keeping the speech in a more conversation style is more effective than in a lecture one.

By the same token presentation should also include a slide show which ought to be managed of how much information it contains. Slides are a tool that facilitates information to the audience specially to visual learners; therefore, it should not be misused by the overuse of colors (Hoffman & Mittelman, 2004). Also, using visual aids such as pictures, diagrams... etc, and technical aids such as computers, projection and display which would significantly complement and complete a presentation (Chiarelli & Melgar, 2001). Printed materials as handouts should not be given to audience; for it definitely will distract their attention and prevents them from listening which can activate their reading skills instead. Alternatively, a simple outline of the presentation with a space for notes is an effective strategy to keep learners' attention focused though out the entire time on the presenter's talk. It is normal and yet healthy for presentation for ESP learners to include a section where they can discuss and ask questions even the hostile ones for the purpose of reliability (Shinn, 2004). Furthermore, appearance, punctuation and eye contact of the presenter all are indications of strength, control and management skills over the given situation (Yang, 2010).

IV. SUGGESTED SOFT SKILL (PRESENTATION) PROGRAM FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTITUTE AT KING ABDUL AZIZ UNIVERSITY

Due to some deficiency that is noticed in learners soft skills, the researcher suggests a presentation training program as a concurrent to foundation year learners who will specialize afterwards in Medicine, Engineering, Art, European Languages...etc. Lower levels start with basic abilities and strategies, whereas, advanced levels of competency should learn more complex strategies. The researcher proposes incorporating training sessions just as the LMS, which is

adopted at the same university to facilitate learning to the four levels at least twice a week. The following is the suggested program:

Program Overview Introduction

A 10-hour training-based course to teach presentation skill to undergraduates is designed. In 10 one-hour session, the course covers technical aspects of written communication, oral presentations to small and medium-sized groups, skills associated with assessing the presentations of others and providing constructive feedback are also taken care of.

Objectives of the Program

The course is based on workshop, group activities, and its general aim is to improve students' skills in presenting information both orally and in writing. By the end of the course, they are expected to have learnt the following:

- to chose a topic, plan, prepare, and present orally to the class
- to know how to lead a discussion
- to master the art of questioning and answering
- to interact with peers firstly and audience at large
- to carry out peer assessment
- to provide constructive feedback

Training 1: The First Session: Ice-breaking

This session is divided into two hours to two classes, and is targeted to level 101 learners. Their proficiency level according to the Common European framework is (A1). They are asked to present a simple presentation, avoiding complexity. The objectives of this first training are general ice-breaking and the introduction of some basic principles of writing. The ice-breaking exercise works remarkably well and can be recommended for more general use, is arranged as follows. The students and teacher are given self-adhesive labels to attach to their clothing and are asked to write on the labels their names (first names and/or nicknames and/or surnames in whatever forms they preferred) plus at least three keywords that has some special relevance to themselves (e.g. place, major and interests). The purpose of the keywords is to act as triggers for the brief conversations with strangers that are to follow. First, they discuss their personal information with the each other and then give a short talk presenting the information learnt from speaking to other peers.

Training 2: The Second Session: Short Presentation

This session is also divided into two hours to two classes, and is aimed to level 102 learners. Their proficiency level according to the Common European framework is (A2).The objectives of this training are to introduce students to the general principles of public speaking and delivering short presentations using L2. The students will be shown a commercially produced training video which illustrates some of the fundamental ideas of presentation. They are also encouraged to discuss their own views and experiences of public speaking, stage fright, and so on. Then, they will be shown the best ways of using overhead projectors, slide projectors, flip charts, and other audio-visual aids, all of which they will be encouraged to try out for themselves. They will be then given, without any prior warning, a list of general topics which support the unit of that week on which to give brief (three-minute) presentations. After selecting one topic each from the list, they spend 15 minutes preparing a talk. Teachers distribute and explain a hand-out containing a checklist for observing presentations and a sheet listing a number of feedback tips and hints. Nevertheless, the teacher keeps track of the time. At the end of the presentation, the audience should be encouraged to applaud. Then, the speaker introduces the person who is to follow, and this continued until every student in the group has spoken. At the end, the teacher leads a constructive informal discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each presentation.

Training 3: The Third Session: Seven-minute Presentations

This session is divided into two hours to two classes as well, and is designed to suit level 103 learners. Their proficiency level according to the Common European framework is (A2-B1). The main objective of this training is to give the students more practice delivering prepared presentations in front of small groups fully using L2. The presentations are slightly longer than the first one, and the members of the audience should be encouraged to give more detailed and structured feedback. Each student should be given a copy of a useful booklet outlined presentations. Learners are required to develop a more complex form of presentations. They have the freedom to choose the topic from the taught units, and expand it with illustrations, examples, pictures and even videos. Nevertheless, a presenter should remember not to include more than one main idea to avoid confusion (Shinn, 2004).

Training 4: The Fourth Session: Pre-prepared Presentations

This session is divided into two hours to two classes, and is aimed to level 104 learners. According to the Common European framework, their proficiency level is (B1). The objectives of this final training are to give students more experience of preparing short presentations, delivering them to the class, and providing feedback on the presentations of others. In this stage, learners should be full presenters, having the confidence to utilize the L2 to serve their aims. Mastering all the above strategies, learners should present with confidence and ease. Since presentations are longer, more complex and presenters have about 10 to 12 minutes to present, they should have not less than three presentations in this last module. The teacher introduces presentation strategies by reminding students of the fundamental principles of effective presentations, including optimal use of audio-visual aids and self-monitoring of verbal and non-verbal communication. The students should be requested at the end of the previous training to prepare ten-minute presentations on academic topics of their own choosing and they have to be supplied with aids and materials. They should present in a conversational like style and comfortably accept others opinions, comments, questions or requests of others to add,

explain or justify a point (Shinn, 2004). The teacher introduces the first speaker, and after each presentation the speaker introduces the one that followed. The members of the audience should be encouraged to make notes during the presentations so that feedback could be given in general terms at the end. After all the presentations, the teacher leads a session of discussion and feedback.

Feedback

Written guidelines (for 102, 103 and 104) for giving feedback and a handout consisting of a set of rating scales for the evaluation of presentations should be distributed and discussed until the students understand them properly. The rating scales related to the content of the presentations (clarity, formativeness, interest); aspects of vocal presentation (volume, clarity, pace, variety); body language (posture, gesture, facial expression, eye contact); and the use of visual aids. At the end of training 3 and 4, members of the audience should be encouraged to fill in their rating sheets out of sight of one another and discuss the presentation tactfully and constructively, with the discussion being carefully monitored by the teacher to provide the presenters with feedback. They are intended only to refine and structure students' evaluations of one another's presentations and to develop their critical skills in this area (Adopted from: Reyndds, 2012).

V. CONCLUSION

It is of great importance to note that ESP learners need to improve their soft skills as they are concentrating on academic and technical skills (Schulz, 2008). The notion of soft skills is increasingly growing and becoming as important as hard skills. Moreover, acquiring of soft skill needs dedication and hard work of ESP learners and employers (Giusti, 2008). Of all soft skills, communication skills and presentation specifically is a must needed skill, because ESP learners will not survive in an industrial rapidly moving world if they lack the essence of this skill which is most important. Acknowledging the importance of it and trying to improve and master such a skill will result in moving toward successfulness in employability. Generally speaking, a successful presentation requires planning, practicing and presenting with flair. In the end, I believe soft skills are important to the extent that it can be designated as life skills.

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