Student Reflections on a Recurrent Theory-Practice Model for Learning Business Presentation Skills

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Table of contents

1. Introduction

In a business context, there are several factors to be considered when it comes to developing presentation skills. These skills encompass clear and effective communication, audience engagement, adept use of non-verbal cues, thorough preparation, effective use of technology, and skillful handling of feedback and questions. These skills are essential for delivering impactful and persuasive presentations in a business environment.

To start with, clarity and effectiveness of communication are crucial. According to a study by Mayer (2009), effective communication is not just about what is said but how it is conveyed. This involves using clear

language, avoiding jargon, and ensuring that the key message is easily understood. Also, visual aids, such as graphs and charts, can be particularly effective in business presentations for illustrating complex data in an accessible way.

However, that is not all, engaging the audience is a critical skill in business presentations. Techniques like storytelling, as discussed by Denning (2011), can be particularly effective. Stories can help contextualize data and make abstract concepts more tangible. They can be used to connect with the audience on an emotional level, making the presentation more memorable. Furthermore, non-verbal communication plays a significant role in the effectiveness of a business presentation. Pease and Pease (2006) emphasize the impact of body language, facial expressions, and eye contact in establishing rapport and maintaining audience engagement.

Nonetheless, preparation and practice are key to delivering a successful business presentation. As noted by Brame (2016), practicing not only helps in refining the content but also boosts the presenter's confidence. This includes rehearsing the timing, transitions, and handling of visual aids. Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy highlights the importance of mastery experiences in building confidence. Regular in-class presentations provide these mastery experiences, helping students to overcome anxiety associated with public speaking and confidence building.

Hymes (1972) emphasized the concept of "communicative competence," which is highly relevant to presentation skills. This competence is directly related to mastery of language, especially in the case of presenting in a foreign language; however, this ability to use language effectively in various contexts can and should be honed through practice. Similarly, Guffey and Loewy (2010) stress the significance of practical exercises in developing business communication skills, including presentations.

In particular, for this study, peer feedback is another important aspect of in-class practice. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) discuss how formative assessment and feedback are essential for student learning. They argue that effective feedback, including peer evaluation during presentations, helps students understand their performance and areas for improvement. This approach is particularly useful in developing presentation skills where immediate and constructive feedback can lead to rapid improvement.

Finally, two other areas to consider when developing business presentation skills are how the topics and training apply to the real world and how students can incorporate technological aids into their presentations. Aligning in-class practice with real-world scenarios is crucial. Zenger and

Folkman (2009) emphasize the importance of real-world application in leadership development, which can be extrapolated to presentation skills training. Presentations designed to mimic real business situations prepare students for the practicalities and challenges of professional presentations. Using technology effectively is increasingly important in business presentations. Mayer's (2009) work on multimedia learning explains how the use of varied media can enhance the learning process, including the development of presentation skills. In another study, Clark and Mayer (2016) also discuss how multimedia tools can enhance presentations, making them more engaging and interactive. This includes the use of videos, interactive graphs, and digital platforms. In-class practice that incorporates technology prepares students for the realities of modern business presentations, which often rely on digital tools.

In-class practice is a critical component of developing effective presentation skills, especially in non-academic contexts. Through practical exercises, peer feedback, confidence-building activities, the use of technology, and alignment with real-world scenarios, students can develop the competencies necessary for impactful presentations in professional settings.

2. Objectives

The objective of this study is to evaluate the efficacy of a theory-practice methodology in teaching business presentation skills. This research aims to explore how the integration of immediate practical application following theoretical instruction impacts student learning, confidence, and skill development in business presentations. Key areas of focus include the effectiveness of this approach in enhancing body language skills, vocal usage, stage presence, visual preparation, and the understanding of business topics.

This study also seeks to understand students' perceptions of the frequency of presentation opportunities and how these experiences influence their learning curve. It aims to investigate if observing peer presentations contributes to students' ability to discern the qualities of a good presentation and apply these insights to their own skills. Another critical aspect of this investigation is to estimate the change in students' self-perceived confidence levels in presenting before an audience from the start to the conclusion of the course.

Through student reflections captured in three-minute videos, the study will gather qualitative data on the subjective experiences and perceived

benefits of the theory-practice methodology. This approach will provide insights into the aspects students found most beneficial, areas of improvement for the course, and the overall effectiveness of the teaching method. The goal is to understand not just the practical outcomes, but also the emotional and cognitive impacts of this educational approach on students preparing for real-world business environments.

3. Methodology

(1) Course method

The study included a diverse cohort of participants, all of whom were engaged in an elective university course focusing on Business Presentation Skills, which was taught using Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodologies. Despite sharing the same instructional content and pedagogical approach, the participants brought a wide variety of backgrounds to the learning environment. This diversity spanned multiple dimensions, including their countries of origin, age ranges, native languages, academic progression—ranging from freshmen to seniors—, varying levels of proficiency in English, and prior experience with public speaking and presentations.

During the initial six weeks, the course structured each session around the development of specific presentation skills, including but not limited to, pacing, posture, stage presence, vocal projection, and the use of nonverbal cues like hand gestures, facial expressions and eye contact. Students engaged in practical exercises that allowed them to apply these skills in a controlled setting. They prepared presentations on straightforward topics, collaborating in groups to refine their delivery through two or three focused rehearsal rounds. The emphasis was placed on mastering these core presentation skills rather than the subject matter of the presentations themselves.

After each presentation, students were immersed in a reflective cycle of growth through peer-to-peer feedback. This critical yet supportive feedback mechanism was designed to highlight areas of strength and opportunities for development, with each student encouraged to thoughtfully integrate the insights gained into their subsequent presentations. The cyclical nature of this process—presenting → receiving feedback → observing others → iterating—cultivated a culture of continuous improvement and mutual support among the groups.

The traning experience was further enriched as students actively watched

their peers, learning valuable lessons from each other's presentation styles, successful strategies, and unique approaches to common challenges. This observation phase was not passive; rather, it was an active analytical practice, allowing students to deconstruct elements of successful presentations and consider how to adapt similar techniques to their own performance.

Complementing the peer-led feedback, the instructor's role was key in leading this process. By offering immediate, targeted feedback and coaching during and after presentations, the instructor not only corrected missteps but also reinforced effective techniques, fostering a deeper understanding of the nuanced art of presenting. The instructor's feedback served as a professional benchmark, guiding students toward the high standards expected in real-world business scenarios. This dynamic interplay between peer review and expert instruction created a robust learning environment, wherein students could experiment, reflect, and refine their presentation skills in a supportive yet challenging context.

Finally, in the concluding half of the course, spanning from weeks 8 to 14, the curriculum transitioned to a practical exploration of varied business scenarios, effectively simulating real-world challenges. This phase introduced role-playing exercises, where students stepped into specific professional personas to deliver presentations, thereby integrating the theoretical skills they had developed into practical, situational exercises.

Throughout these immersive sessions, the presentation skills previously learned were not merely revisited but actively refined. Students engaged in a deliberate practice of these skills, striving for mastery while benefiting from an ongoing feedback loop. Feedback was consistently provided by both peers and the instructor, who monitored the students' progress, offering guidance tailored to the context of each scenario.

This period of the course was crucial, as it allowed students to apply and consolidate their learning in a context that closely mirrored the challenges they would face in the business world. The sustained practice and feedback during this stage were instrumental in ensuring that students not only understood the mechanics of good presentation skills but could also adapt and apply them fluidly in a variety of business contexts.

(2) Data collection

The data collection for this study was based on a qualitative methodology, centering on first-hand reflective accounts of the students' learning experiences. The primary data were gathered through personal reflection 3-

minute videos, where students expressed the impact of the theory-practice pedagogical approach on their skill development.

The content of these reflections was directed by seven specific prompts, which students were free to use at will, encouraging a comprehensive and multifaceted examination of the methodology's effectiveness. The task instruction as well the prompts, provided through the university LMS, read as follows:

> *Please record a 3-minute reflection video on this method and how it has impacted your learning and your preparation for the tasks. You may include:*
> - *How effective this methodology was for you to learn business presentation skills.*
> - *Which aspects you consider had the strongest impact on your learning: body language skills, use of voice, stage presence, visual preparation, business topics, etc.*
> - *How you felt about the frequency of opportunities for presenting.*
> - *If, by watching other presentations, you could learn and realize what makes a good presentation and how to improve your own.*
> - *How confident you feel presenting in front of an audience now compared to when you started this course.*
> - *Things you think were good/very good in this course.*
> - *Any areas in which the instructor could improve this course.*

Students' responses (n=18) were expected to provide nuanced insights into the learning process, the practical application of skills, and their personal development journey through the course. The video reflections allowed for an in-depth analysis of student experiences, offering a rich (transcribed) dataset for examining the efficacy of the theory-practice model in teaching presentation skills.

4. Results

(1) Evaluation of the effectiveness of the theory-practice method

The analysis of student reflections revealed a pattern indicating that the theory-practice methodology was highly effective in developing business presentation skills. Students consistently noted improvements in body

language, voice use, and stage presence, attributing their enhanced performance to the frequent practice and immediate application of concepts learned in class. Observing peer presentations was also deemed beneficial, as it provided additional learning opportunities and inspiration for improvement. Although a few students expressed a desire for more practice time and others found the presentation frequency challenging, overall, the method was well-received for its practicality and real-world relevance. Confidence levels in presenting significantly increased from the beginning to the end of the course, affirming the value of this experiential learning approach.

(2) Identification of the most impactful aspects of learning

Students recognized body language as a cornerstone of effective communication, with half of the sample (n=18) highlighting its significance. Stage presence also featured prominently, with nearly 40% acknowledging its impact on their ability to engage and captivate an audience. Beyond these primary areas, a subset of two students noted the importance of being well-versed in business topics and proficient in English, implying that a solid grasp of content and language is integral to delivering a compelling presentation. Additional components like the use of visual aids, voice projection, and the overall structure of the presentation, though mentioned less frequently, were acknowledged as nuanced elements that could make or break the delivery of a presentation. These aspects, while not the focal point for most, were nonetheless recognized for their impact in their learning of presentation dynamics and skills.

(3) Opinions on the sufficiency (frequency) of opportunities provided for presenting

The students' reflections on the frequency of presentation opportunities in the course reveal a range of opinions. Several students found the frequency to be high but beneficial for rapid skill development, as one student stated, "I support such a high frequency of presentation because a good presenter needs constant practice." Another student echoed this sentiment, noting the frequency as "just right" and helpful for continuous improvement. On the other hand, some students expressed challenges with the pace. For instance, the end of the semester being "a little bit hard" due to the quick turnaround for presentations was a factor also mentioned. One more student suggested that the frequency was high, but ultimately effective,

as it made them "better class by class." These varying viewpoints underscore the diverse experiences and adaptability of the students to the course demands.

(4) Insights gained from observing peer presentations

The data showed that it was evident that observing peer presentations fostered significant learning experience for the students. They gained practical insights into various presentation styles and techniques. This observation process helped them recognize the nuances of effective presentations, such as the impact of body language, the importance of voice modulation, and the use of visual aids.

Students also noted the benefits of seeing how their peers handled different topics and scenarios. This exposure to a range of approaches and topics broadened their understanding and offered inspiration for their own presentations. Many students reflected on specific elements they observed in their peers' presentations that they found effective and planned to incorporate into their style.

Furthermore, the opportunity to observe others provided a holistic learning environment, fostering a culture of shared learning and growth. Students were able to learn not only from their own experiences and feedback but also from the successes and challenges faced by their peers. This collective learning experience was instrumental in enhancing their presentation skills and confidence.

(5) Comparison of confidence levels in public speaking before and after the course

Upon reviewing the transcriptions, it's clear that students experienced a significant boost in confidence in public speaking after completing the course. This increase in confidence can be attributed to the hands-on, practical nature of the course, which allowed students to continuously practice and refine their presentation skills. The opportunity to receive constructive feedback from both peers and the instructor played a crucial role in this improvement. By engaging in regular presentations, students were able to overcome their initial fears and nervousness, gradually building a sense of ease and confidence when speaking in front of an audience. This transformation was not only evident in their self-assessments but also in the way they approached and delivered their presentations by the end of the course.

(6) Highlights of the course's positive elements

The students' mentioned several positive elements in their reflection videos, among them they talked about the practical application of skills, the regular presentation opportunities, improvement in body language and stage presence, an increase in confidence, learning from peer presentations, adapting one's style to better fit cultural norms, significant improvement in English language skills and varied personal growth and challenges. However, they showed a clear pattern in terms of common themes and variations in their experiences.

Common themes include a strong appreciation for the practical nature of the course, allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios. Many students highlighted the benefit of regular presentations, which not only improved their presentation skills but also boosted their confidence. The course was also praised for enhancing soft skills such as body language and stage presence, with students recognizing significant personal growth in these areas.

In terms of variations, students' experiences differed based on their backgrounds and individual learning paths. Some noted the impact of cultural differences on their learning experience, while others mentioned varying levels of English proficiency, which influenced their engagement with the course. Despite these differences, each student's reflection pointed towards a unique journey of personal and professional development, underlining the course's ability to cater to diverse needs and learning styles.

(7) Suggestions for course improvement

Students provided several suggestions to improve the course. A common request was for more opportunities for group presentations and peer interactions, allowing for a more collaborative learning environment. Students also expressed a desire for a more balanced frequency of presentations, with some finding the current pace challenging due to other academic commitments. Additionally, there was interest in expanding the range of topics, particularly towards other business-related themes. Lastly, students suggested incorporating more practical guidance on using tools such as PowerPoint for improving their presentation visuals. These suggestions reflect a desire for a more interactive, diverse, and supportive learning framework that accommodates different learning styles and needs.

5. Discussion

This study explored the effectiveness of a theory-practice model in teaching business presentation skills, emphasizing the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical application. Reflecting on the students' experiences and the results obtained, it is evident that the approach significantly enhanced their presentation abilities.

There are three main components to highlight from this study. First, the integration of theory and practice was central to this study, resonating with Mayer's (2009) insights on effective communication. The students' ability to convey ideas clearly and effectively was notably improved, aligning with Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, which highlights the role of practical experiences in building confidence and skills. Second, peer feedback emerged as a critical component, in line with Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) emphasis on its importance in the learning process. This approach fostered a reflective and constructive learning environment, allowing for continuous improvement in presentation skills. Moreover, the study's findings align with Voerman et al. (2012), who underscored the importance of feedback in the learning process. This study extends this understanding by demonstrating how structured feedback within a theory-practice model not only enhances skill acquisition but also fosters a deeper understanding of presentation techniques and their practical applications. The last outstanding outcome of the study was the improvement in students' confidence levels, a point that resonates with Brame's (2016) advocacy for practice in skill development. This increase in confidence was attributed to the cumulative effect of integrating theory and practice, peer feedback, and observational learning.

On the other hand, observational learning, as suggested by Denning (2011), also played a significant role. Students gained valuable insights from watching their peers, echoing Hymes' (1972) concept of communicative competence. This aspect of learning was instrumental in helping students identify and adopt effective presentation techniques. Moreover, the study also highlights the influence of cultural and linguistic diversity on learning outcomes, supporting Guffey and Loewy's (2010) views on the value of practical exercises in diverse contexts. This diversity enhanced the learning experience, preparing students for varied cultural and linguistic settings in business environments. Finally, the incorporation of technology into presentations was another key finding, aligning with Mayer and Clark's (2016) research on multimedia learning. Students found that

using digital tools like PowerPoint and interactive graphs made their presentations more engaging and relevant to modern business contexts.

To sum up, the theory-practice model proved effective in developing business presentation skills, offering a comprehensive approach that included communication skill improvement, the importance of feedback and observational learning, and the integration of technology. The diversity within the student sample further enriched the learning experience, demonstrating the model's adaptability to various contexts. These findings contribute to the literature by providing empirical support for the model's effectiveness in a real-world educational setting and offering valuable insights for future pedagogical approaches in business communication and presentation training.

6. Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of a theory-practice model in teaching business presentation skills. The integration of theoretical knowledge with practical application, as evidenced through enhanced communication skills, improved confidence, and the effective use of technology, was central to the students' learning experience. Peer feedback and observational learning emerged as vital components, contributing significantly to skill development and understanding of presentation techniques. Additionally, the study highlighted the enriching impact of cultural and linguistic diversity in learning environments. These findings offer valuable insights for educators and practitioners in business communication, underscoring the importance of a comprehensive, practice-oriented approach in presentation skills training. The study not only demonstrates the success of the recurrent theory-practice model in a tertiary educational setting but also provides a framework for future pedagogical strategies aimed at equipping students with essential skills for the modern business world. This approach, with its emphasis on practical application, feedback, and continuous improvement, is a robust method for developing competent, confident business communicators.

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