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Students' Challenges and Language Learning Strategies in a Group Presentation in the Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract. During the pandemic, online learning was the inevitable surge. Now, in the postpandemic recovery, schools and universities have initiated to start offline learning. This research attempted to investigate challenges and students' language learning strategies in giving a group presentation in the post-pandemic era. Fifty students, the third semester students taking Pre-Advanced Speaking class at STBA JIA Bekasi, participated in this research. The participants involved had online learning for the last two semesters and the third semester was their first time having offline classes. So, to address the research questions regarding their challenges and language learning strategies, the questionnaire was distributed. The findings showed that most of the students believed confidence was their major challenge in giving a group presentation in the post-pandemic era. While for the language learning strategies, the majority of participants adopted cognitive strategies such as planning and organizing their presentation. It shows that strategies help language learners in overcoming the problems of their language learning.

Keywords: group presentation, language learning strategies, post-pandemic era, students' challenges

Introduction

As one of the skills in English, speaking has always been a hurdle in non-native Englishspeaking countries such as in Indonesia. Based on the EF English Proficiency index in 2022, the global rank of Indonesia is 81 out of 111 countries (EF EPI EF English Proficiency Index, 2022). This rank is considered low proficiency if compared to its neighboring countries such as Philippines (rank 20), Malaysia (rank 24), and Vietnam (ranked 60). As a foreign language in Indonesia, English is not applied on a daily basis which means it applies only on formal occasions such as in schools. So, classroom activities in language learning plays a pivotal role to improve English proficiency. In undergraduate schools, it is not uncommon to find a group presentation as a task even though it is considered demanding for non-native speakers as they lack training and experience in using English (Morita, 2000). Regardless the challenges, a group presentation is an

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opportunity for students to practice English and develop their presentation skills (Zappa-Hollman, 2007).

However, the face of education has dramatically changed since the pandemic began to spread across the world. Various learning adjustments were made by the governments and online learning was introduced to replace the face-to-face learning including in university levels. The term "online learning" or "distance learning" has taken root to become a pivotal part in education which brings a new face in education and gained its popularity since the COVID-19 outbreak (Alcontin, 2021) regardless the challenges such as the internet access, how to adapt with technology, how to teach a coursebook in an online class, and anxiety (Lestiyanawati & Widyantoro, 2020a; Rasmitadila et al., 2020; Setiawan, 2021; Simamora, 2020). This learning is defined as the important method which is strategic and practical approach to teach in education and has developed significantly around the world now (Ivone et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). The School of Foreign Languages JIA or STBA JIA, a higher education situated in Bekasi, Indonesia, has conducted face-to-face learning after few semesters online learning were held from 2020 - 2021. This situation leads the researcher to explore further about the impacts of the students' prior virtual learning to their strategies and challenges when giving a presentation in the real classroom in the speaking class.

Speaking in a group presentation is the main concern in this study because, in line with the required skills in the globalized world, communication is one of the 21st century skills. The research related to the challenges and strategies on a group presentation have widely been studied by previous scholars. Yang (2010) pointed that the academic presentation was a great challenge to the students and to compensate their limited speaking abilities, the students delivered a thorough case analysis rather than engage in the class discussion. In other words, some students may view that class discussion is demanding; therefore, they preferred to avoid it. In addition, Morita (2000) studied the discourse socialization of non-native and native-English-speaking graduate students through their engagement in oral academic presentations. She found that both non-native and native speakers became apprenticed into the group presentations. This shows that learners apply some strategies to compensate their weaknesses in giving a presentation.

Studies regarding language learning strategies have been done by the other scholars such as Yabukoshi & Takeuchi (2009) who investigated the strategies used by lower secondary school learners in Japan, Yilmaz (2010) who attempted to find the relationship between language learning strategies, gender, proficiency and self-efficacy beliefs. Other studies discussing the importance of language learning strategies were also carried out by some scholars (Almoslamani, 2022; Biwer et al., 2022; Tomar & Jindal, 2014)Yet, as far as the author is aware, there is little research carried out on investigating language learning strategies in the post-pandemic era. This is one of the reasons why this research is important to be done.

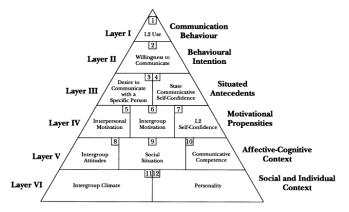


Figure 1. Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC (Macintyre, 1998)

There are a number of factors which can be the students' obstacles in using the L2 (second language). These challenges, in some ways, give impacts on the success of their speaking in a group presentation. With that being said, the researcher attempted to explain the challenges using the heuristic model by Macintyre (1998) which was used to indicate one's willingness to communicate, but it can also explain a number of potential influences of L2 use. The model consists of six layers which are categorized into two categories: situation-specific categories (layers I-III) and enduring influences (layers IV-VI). As can be seen from Figure 1, layer I (L2 use) can be reached when speakers have willingness to communicate (layer II), and the willingness to communicate is established from the desire to communicate and state of communicate of self-confidence (layer III). Similarly, the other building blocks (layer IV-VI) are essential factors which influence the L2 use.

In addition to the heuristic model of variables influencing WTC, the researcher connects the theory of students' obstacles to the Levelt's model (Goh & Burns, 2012). The model describes how speech is produced which comprises 3 stages: conceptual preparation, formulation, and articulation (see Figure 2). According to this model, conceptual preparation (the stage where learners select the topic and ideas from their long-term-memory) is the initial stage of speech production. Goh & Burns (2012) claim that the familiarity of the topic will help learners communicate. The second stage is formulation which defines the process in which it releases the ideas gathered in conceptualisation. It is said that formulation is the hardest part among all stages because learners should consider the rules of grammar and appropriate vocabulary when speaking (Goh & Burns, 2012). And the last stage is articulation or the execution of the words in terms of the articulatory system such as vocal tract, larynx, lungs, and other parts contributing to speech production. The researcher believes that the students' challenges may be in the areas of these stages.

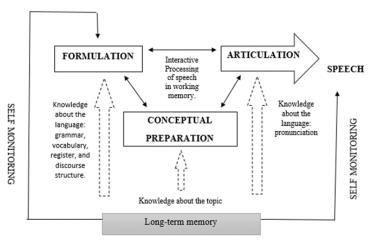


Figure 2. Levelt's Model of Speech Processing (Goh & Burns, 2012)

In doing a group presentation, learners may employ a number of learning strategies to compensate their limited abilities in using L2 and improve their performance. Oxford (2011b cited in Brown, 2007)) explain several language strategies (see the following):

- 1. Cognitive strategies such as planning, organizing, monitoring, evaluating, using senses, activating knowledge, contextualization, and going beyond the data.
- 2. Affective strategies which consist of activating, supportive emotions, minimizing negative emotions, generating motivation, and building positive attitudes.

- 3. Sociocultural-interactive strategies which include interacting to learn, overcoming knowledge gaps, guessing intelligently, guessing intelligently, generating conversation and activating sociocultural schemata.
- 4. Compensatory strategies (e.g., avoidance, circumlocution, approximation, word coinage, nonverbal signals, prefabricated patterns, code switching, appeal to authority, and keeping the floor).

The purpose of the study is to investigate the challenges and learning strategies employed by the students of STBA JIA in Pre-Advanced Speaking class in the post-pandemic recovery. Pre-Advanced Speaking is a mandatory subject in semester three which aims to give the necessary skills which enable them to speak more confidently in various topics. There are three classes which consist of 20 - 25 students in each class. They had online learning in semester 1 and semester 2, so the third semester was their first semester meeting their friends face-to-face in the classroom. They were divided into groups which consisted of four to five people and each group had to give a presentation about the topic given by the lecturer. As an example, the topic is "childhood" and the target languages are asking about childhood and reminiscing about childhood. During the presentation, they were told to make PPT slides and a game as the ice-breaker which was played before the presentation started. Their presentation was assessed based on the clarity, creativity, preparation, and understanding of the topic.

Method

The participants involved in this study were the third semester students taking Pre-Advanced Speaking class at STBA JIA. There were 50 students who completed the questionnaire with 10 males and 40 females. As previously mentioned, the research focused on analyzing their challenges and language learning strategies in doing a group presentation in the post-pandemic era. With regards to the aims mentioned, the two questions formulated are 1) what are the students' challenges on giving a group presentation in the post-pandemic era? 2) what are the students' language learning strategies on giving a group presentation in the post-pandemic era? To gain information about the language learning strategies and their challenges, an open questionnaire was distributed. They could write the answers either in English or Indonesian so that they could provide comprehensive answers without language barriers in using L2. The students' responses were then analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to find the learning strategies based on the language learning categories written by Oxford (2011b cited in Brown, 2007) and the challenges of using L2 according to the heuristic model of variables influencing WTC (Macintyre, 1998) and the Levelt's model. The responses from the participants were analysed and categorized according to its learning strategy with numeric data and the explanation was explained descriptively.

Findings and discussion

Findings

In addressing the first research question, it was found that self-confidence was the most perceived challenge by the participants (52%). It is relevant to the heuristic model which places state communicative self-confidence as the situated antecedents in layer III as one of the building blocks in using L2. In other words, the students felt they still needed to deal with confidence to present in front of their friends in the offline class. Two other factors which had quite high percentages were how to make their presentation easy-to-understand (14%) and how to make an effective presentation (12%). Based on the figure, it correlates to layer III which is desire to communicate with a specific person. In this context, the participants had a desire to communicate to their peers as the audiences in the classroom through a presentation. Yet, if they see it as a threat, they may not be able to use the L2.

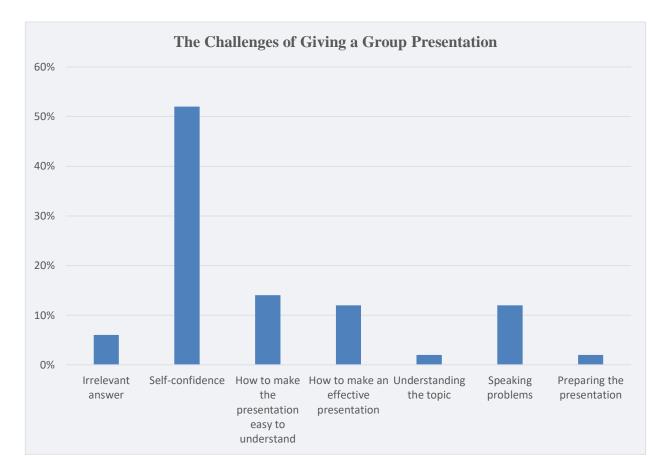


Figure 3. The Challenges of Giving a Group Presentation

Besides, 12% of the total participants had an issue with the speaking skills which means these students dealt with the communicative competence (layer V), the enduring influence. The participants may realize their language proficiency was still low, and this was seen as their challenge to give a group presentation. The remaining responses were related to understanding the topic (2%) and preparing the presentation (2%). In the Levelt's model (Goh & Burns, 2012), it explains how the knowledge of the topic can give an impact on the speech production. When the participants found the topic presentation difficult, this could influence their group presentation. Therefore, strategies are important to deal with this particular challenge.

While for the second research question, a number of strategies were identified. As can be seen in the figure below, the highest language learning strategy fell to cognitive strategies (60%) such as preparing the presentation, rehearsing in groups, practicing using an L2 before giving the presentation in the class, making the presentation as interesting as possible, and comprehending the materials. The other language learning strategies applied were sociocultural strategies (20%) (e.g., interacting with the audiences during the presentation, connecting with the audiences, and paying attention to the class), affective strategies (16%) (e.g., keeping calm and boosting their confidence), and the last is compensatory strategies (4%) (e.g., using simple words when giving a presentation). The detailed information about the strategies is explained in the next section.

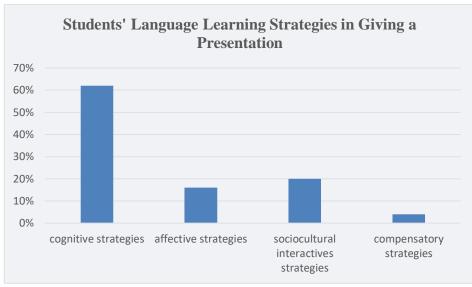


Figure 4. Students' language learning strategies in a group presentation

Discussion

In the post-pandemic era, it was found that self-confidence (52%) was the biggest challenge when giving a group presentation. The following are the responses selectively chosen by the author.

- S2: I'll says that it would be my confidence while speaking in front of the class. I'm not really confident with myself to be looked by many people. It would be my speaking too, because I'm not really fluent at it but I tried to be more better.
- S4: The challenge was on my confidence to speak directly in frontal of the class, it was enough to make me nervous.
- S7: I need to completely get rid of the shyness and nervousness, and also stop caring about other people's expressions and all
- S17: confidence and inability to 'spew' out some useful words
- S28: Karena keterbiasaannya kelas online saya merasa canggung ketika kelas offline
- S48: for me the challenge that I experienced after online learning was that I definitely had to get used to speaking directly in front of many people and building high self-confidence because I was not very fluent in speaking.
- S35: tantangan nya yaitu gugup ketika berbicara menyampaikan materi dan ketika berhadapan langsung dengan banyak orang di depan kelas.

Speaking in front of people in L2 and presenting the materials appeared to be the reasons for their low self-confidence. Based on the heuristic model (Macintyre, 1998), it is the situated antecedent which can influence their L2 use when giving a group presentation. Confidence is the key role to use L2, so it suggests that the participants must increase their confidence level in order to give an effective presentation (Derakhshan et al., 2015). Confidence gives them strong belief that they can give a good presentation. Referring to the heuristic model, their low confidence also affects to their willingness to communicate. So, when they do not feel confident, they will be reluctant to speak. Besides, the transition from online to offline learning also increased their nervousness in the group presentation as during the online learning their engagement between learner to learner and learner to teacher were limited. Moreover, the fact that online learning has some challenges (e.g., dysfunctional device, internet connection, etc.) give some drawbacks for the students to communicate (Lestiyanawati & Widyantoro, 2020b).

The group presentation aimed to deliver the topic which had been shared by the lecturer by using the target language as explained in the previous section. The situation given encouraged them to find ways to make their presentations interesting and the materials understandable to the audiences. Some students may see it as a challenge to improve their presentation skills and some may see it as a threat. In other words, they had a desire to communicate that is to please their class with a good presentation as expected by their friends. Yet, the findings showed that 14 % and 12% the participants found this situation was a challenge in the post-pandemic era. Like confidence, this could affect to their L2 use and therefore, they would employ language learning strategies to succeed their presentation (Yang, 2010). The following are some of their responses.

- S8: My main challenge is to be able to control the audience during offline presentations and also I must be as interesting as possible to make the audience can easily understand the material that being explained.
- S9: Membangun suasana yang menyenangkan bagi orang lain dan ide-ide kreatif.
- S16: to build atmosphere and get attention from audience
- S23: There weren't many challenges, but I did feel a little pressure because I needed to make it easier for others to understand the material that being explained.
- S34: The most challenges is how to make the presentation more creative, because audience must have interested with our presentation.
- S39: Tantangan utamanya lebih gugup dan harus lebih baik dalam menyiapkan materi presentasi, harus lebih kreatif lagi, agar para pendengar bisa memahami apa yang kami sampaikan dengan baik.
- S41: My main challenge is how to make the topics that I will present easy to understand. Because if it's not easy to understand, other people who listen to it will be confused about what we are going to present.
- 46: we must make everyone understand what we are going to present
- 47: Make those in the room understand the material that I'm making, plus the presentation is also made using English so we as material carriers feel very responsible for that.

The rest of the participants believed that their challenge was their speaking ability or communicative competence (12%). One of the participants stated that she could not look up words in a dictionary to compensate their mistakes in using L2. It was the challenge of giving a group presentation in the offline class as the group presentation during the online learning enabled her to open a dictionary without being noticed by her peers or lecturer. Another student explained that their language barriers were pronunciation and word choice. Communicative competence in a group presentation is of paramount importance. According to the heuristic model, communicative competence is the building block in layer V which is related to affective-cognitive context (enduring influences). Brown (2007) summarized from Hymes, defines communicative competence as the ability to send and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within a specific context. This factor can influence their confidence to speak, so it suggests that the participants should improve their English skills in order to have better communicative competence.

- S19: interactions talking to the audience and questions from lecturers that make us nervous.
- S24: Tantangan utama bagi saya saat harus presentasi depan kelas adalah takut salah dalam menyebutkan suatu kata (miss pronunciation). karena Bahasa inggris bukan Bahasa utama saya, maka sering kali saya salah dan terasa malu dalam mengucapkan suatu kata meskipun itu hanya didepan teman saya. dan saya lebih

takut dan malu apabila saya melakukannya didepan dosen. selain itu saya juga such tiba-tiba lupa vocabullary suatu kata dari Bahasa indonesia ke vocabulaire Bahasa inggris.

- S26: In my opinion, one of main challenges is how to start a conversation directly in English without look at the dictionary. In online class, it could be easy to use dictionary secretly with nobody knows. However, this challenge should not be a problem for students.
- S36: Sometimes when i present i always lost of words and i didn't know how to dominate the presentation
- S49: masih susah dalam hal berkomunikasi dengan Bahasa Inggris

Regarding the language learning strategies, most of the participants chose to prepare the materials well and rehearse the presentation (60%). It shows that they employed cognitive strategies which consist of planning, organizing, monitoring, evaluating, etc. They believed that the strategy could help them give an effective and interesting presentation. This could relate with their biggest challenge which was confidence meaning that employing cognitive strategies were hoped to be able to boost their confidence.

- S2: I'll prepare my group presentation to be the perfect one and understanding the materials that we'll present to our friends in the class so it may help my confidence while I'm speak in front of them.
- S3: Try to practice speaking and reviewing material before the presentation start, also telling myself that after its done it'll be fine. So I get less nervous and don't stumble with my words from forgetting the material.
- S7: Prepare carefully before the presentation, because it will really help so that we can explain smoothly without stumbling.
- S15: continuously speak english in everywhere you go so that it is smooth during in presentation and not nerveous. and then, invrease creativity in the presentation.
- S20: saya akan melakukan menghafal vocab lebih banyak lagi. lalu mendengarkan musik dan menonton movie english dengan subtitle indonesia, dan menonton conversation di you tube atau aplikasi lain nya.
- S40: 1. I always prepare material well in advance so that during presentations I understand the material to be delivered. 2. A few days before the presentation my group and I always practice presentations so that during presentations there are no mistakes. 3. When giving presentations, I always try to look neat to increase my confidence

In addition to it, they also adopted sociocultural interactive strategies (20%) by engaging and connecting with the audiences such as asking questions, personalizing, generating conversations, etc. They believed that this way could make their presentation more effective and the audiences could enjoy the presentation.

- S18 I have to be more talk active and make a proper interaction with the participant so it won't be boring.
- S26: In giving group presentations, there must be an active connection between each other, how to get the participants to talk in conveying their opinions or communicating with other students, breaking the ice so that it is not monotonous like making games in between the material. From those strategies, the possibility of creating a class atmosphere that is fun but also meaningful.
- S27: we can interact a lot directly with classmates and dare to explain presentations in front of the class

S46: we have to approach with other people so that this strategy maybe will help us for presentation in speaking class and appreciate for someone who can answer the question

The affective strategies were also applied by some participants in the post-pandemic era. The finding shows that 6% of the total participants attempted to build confidence, stay focused, and stay calm. They tried to encourage themselves and make positive statements (activating supportive emotions) and use relaxation to lower their anxiety (building positive attitudes) (Oxford, 2011b cited in Brown, 2007).

- S6: Build my confident by speaking in front of class
- S10: Mencoba tenang dan fokus pada materi dan persiapan sebelumnya apa yang harus dibicarakan saat presentasi agar tidak terlihat buruk ketika mempresentasikannya
- S11: We have to be more confident and prepare well
- S38: Berbicara lebih mudah dan tidak nervous
- S44: trying to keep calm i guess

The last strategy used by the participants was compensatory that is by making up the gaps of their incompetency (Brown, 2007). 1 out of 50 students said that she used easy words to present which means she avoided using difficult words (avoidance). Avoidance is one of the techniques in compensatory strategies.

S41: 1. Use words that are easier to understand So that the topics conveyed can be easily understood, it is better when presenting to use language that is easier for the audience to understand. 2. trying to speak clearly Sometimes because I'm nervous, it usually makes me not speak clearly when doing presentations offline. therefore, I have to learn how to speak clearly during presentations so that the topics presented can be more easily understood.

Conclusion

The research aimed to explore students' language learning strategies and the challenges in giving a group presentation in the post-pandemic recovery. Using the questionnaire, it was found that the most perceived challenge by the participants in a group presentation was confidence. They had to deal with confidence and nervousness in speaking in front of the class since for the past two semesters their interaction was conducted virtually on Zoom and Google Meet. The other challenges spotted were how to prepare the materials, how to make an interesting presentation, their lack of communicative competence, and how to prepare the presentation. Meanwhile, the majority of the participants adopted cognitive strategies in giving a group presentation. They attempted to prepare and rehearse in order to present an effective presentation. The other three strategies were sociocultural interactive strategies, affective strategies, and compensatory strategy. It can be concluded that language learning strategies helped the participants in overcoming the problems during their group presentation in the post-pandemic era, so it suggests that teachers or lectures can introduce the strategies to their students.

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