

BREAKING AWAY FROM EXAM-ORIENTED MENTALITY THROUGH PRESENTATIONS IN EST LESSONS

By

Lucy Chuo Mee Hong
Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan St. Luke,
95000 Sri Aman.

Abstract

This action research was done to find out whether presentations in EST lessons could be used to break my students and I away from the exam-oriented mentality in EST. This paper presents how the research was carried out in a Form 5 Science stream class during EST lessons at SMK St. Luke, Sri Aman and the findings obtained. All the students, that is, 33 of them were involved. This technique provided opportunities for students to practise their research skills, designed power-point slides and doing presentations in front of their friends in class. Moreover, during presentations, students have the opportunities to share the topics they have chosen with their friends in class. They have to answer questions posed by their friends on the topics they have presented. Observation, interviews, questionnaire and journal writing were among the methods used in collecting data. I found that students like this learning technique and they strongly felt that they have learned a lot through presentations in class.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

English for Science and Technology was introduced as an elective paper for upper secondary school students in this country four years ago. The syllabus was written in line with globalisation and advancement in information and communications technology (ICT). It is geared towards preparing students for this new era by training them to gain knowledge and use it for advancement in various fields, especially in science and technology, and studies at tertiary level. The main aim of this syllabus is to provide students with the language basis to access and understand materials on science and technology and to express ideas and concepts in English (Syllabus Specification for EST).

In my school, it is compulsory for all the students in the Science stream to take this subject. There are many different kinds of attitudes shown by the students towards the study of this subject. Between the two Form 5 classes that I am teaching, the students in 5 Utarid (Ud) (pure Science class) are generally more interested and responsive if compared 5 Zuhrah (semi Science class). Unfortunately, many of them regard this subject as an examination subject, which means that they study EST for the sake of passing the examination. This is totally in contrary to the basic aim of studying EST as specified earlier. Very often, I find myself being influenced by the

students (or was it that I have influenced them?) because I tend to explain to them how to score better marks for EST and teach them how to write the correct and precise answers.

In order to break them and I away from this exam-oriented mentality, I have tried many ways to make the lessons interesting and being students-centred. I tried to ask them to do group work and to present their points in the class. In the process of doing that, I discovered that they do not have presentation skills. Most of them just showed their points on transparency or Power-point slides and read out the points. They did not know how to explain and elaborate. I even downloaded many interesting and up-to-date materials from the internet in order to capture their interests and attention.

The circumstances described above made me feel strongly that I need to teach them how to do a good presentation and to help them realize that EST is very much related to other Science subjects, interesting and enjoyable. They must try to take off their minds from the examination.

The main focus of my study was on making students from 5 Ud realized that learning EST would enable them to learn other things, not just for examination purpose. This was to be achieved through them doing presentations.

MY CONCERN

The following are some brief description of a few of my lessons that showed clearly my concern. The focus was on how my students treated the usual EST lessons and how they responded to my attempts to make EST more interesting for them.

The first lesson was on the theme 'Invention'. The topic was 'Body Armour'. The reading text was given in their workbook. There is no textbook for EST and I have resorted to asking them photocopied a workbook which I have chosen earlier. I started the lesson with a few questions on how the soldiers in the olden days protected themselves, as compared to the bullet-proof vests. Of course the boys were more responsive and the girls seemed to know very little about this topic. Then, they read through the text silently before I discussed the text with them. We then did some word study and comprehension exercises; followed by the exam format exercises such as information transfer, writing reports and articles, and some grammar practice. After they have completed all these exercises, I would check the answers by discussing in class if there is time. During that activity, I would remind them to be careful with this and that. They would also ask whether they could write their answers like this or like that or not to write this or that in the examination. That was the usual lesson that I did with them since they were in Form 4. Sometimes, I would find more interesting texts from the internet but the exercises were almost the same.

Another lesson that I did with them was more student-centred and I acted only as their facilitator. I divided the students into groups of 4, gave them a topic or a theme each and asked them to find materials from whatever resources available. For that, I would bring them to the library. Then, they were to present whatever they have

researched in class after one or two weeks' discussion. I found that not all of them contributed. Most of the time, only one or two members in the group did the research and the presentation. During their presentation, many of them just read the points they have written on the transparencies or slides without doing much explanation. Normally, after each presentation, only one or two students and usually the expected ones would ask questions. Many of them did not know how to answer and in the end, they did not gain much.

In order to encourage the students in using ICT during EST, in one of the lessons I asked the class to prepare Power-point slides and to present them in class. The topic I gave them was 'Modern Transportation' and it was given a month before the real lesson was carried out. They were divided into groups of 4. I did not teach them any presentation skills or how to do slides because I know many of them are very good in using the computer.

On the day of presentation, 3 groups presented their work. 'Queen Elizabeth II - The Luxurious Ship' was the first group presentation topic. The group leader is a school debater and he is very fluent in English. So, he did quite a good presentation since he knew how to explain. The Power-point slides were also done quite well since he is a computer enthusiast. After his presentation, only one student asked him questions. The following group presented the topic 'Putra LRT'. This group consisted of 4 girls did not prepare well for their presentation and the presenter read out the points from the slides which were very poorly prepared as well. They were not able to answer the questions which I 'forced' some of the students to ask. The third group talked on 'Bullet Train'. The topic itself was interesting but unfortunately they did not have much to present. Again, this showed that they were not well prepared as well.

From the description above, it was very clear that EST is not an interesting subject and many of them find it too technical. Many of them admitted later that they do not like the subject. They studied it so that they could get another credit or distinction in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination since they do not need to memorise anything.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study was to help the researcher and the students break away from the exam oriented mentality in EST through doing presentation in class.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How does presentation in EST help the researcher and the students break away from the exam-oriented mentality?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research did a survey on the 'Education System Perceptions Survey' in December 2005 and one of the aspects surveyed was on whether Malaysian Education System is exam-oriented or not? 58 percent (%) of the 479 respondents with school going children answered "yes", 38% answered

“balanced system” and 4% couldn’t decide on the system. This shows that most parents are aware that their children are under the pressure of exams and very often, what they discussed with their children was how many A’s they could get.

It was reported in *Xinhua* paper on 6 March 2006 that the Malaysian Education Minister mentioned that his ministry is looking for best ways to overhaul the heavily examination-oriented system in schools. He doesn’t deny that the examination system is a burden to some teachers and students alike. That is why a new system is needed. His ministry realized that the current system in schools is impractical, burdensome to students and fail to reflect on the capabilities of the students.

It was also reported that the country’s education system would undergo a major revamp in stages to make it less exam oriented by 2020 (Bernama, 21 March 2006). The Minister also hoped that would change the teachers, parents and community perspectives on exams and viewed students in a wholesome perspective. The Ministry would consider reducing the number of subjects taught in schools, replace the term system with semester system and work on a new evaluation system for students.

During the MELTA Forum on 24 August 2006, a teacher commented that when it comes to any exam-oriented subjects, no student would say that they study because of interest. If students are really interested in the subject, the subject would not be called exam-oriented in the first place. Interest and exam will never come together, and that is the ‘curse’ in the education system. In the same forum on 31 August 2006, another teacher said that teaching exam classes does not mean that the teacher has to confine himself or herself in teaching the students how to answer exam questions. He or she can conduct the lessons in a more creative and innovative way which mostly deals with students-centred approach. Another teacher expressed the following opinion on 22 September 2006 in the forum. Exam-oriented teaching is disastrous especially to the students. Students normally show less interest when teachers mention about exams. Students prefer to read, discuss, analyse and give opinions rather than sit for exams. Teachers should realize that they have to prepare their students for real life situations. When students are confined to exam-oriented learning, they tend to lose their interest in studying the subject. English teachers should know how to teach their students and at the same time prepare them for exams.

To summarize, teachers should be more flexible rather than being confined by the current education system. The exam-oriented type of teaching is just a guideline for the teachers and teachers should do adjustment to it. Teachers should prepare students for the exam and at the same time inject creativity and fun into the lessons. And that I attempted to do so in this study through presentations in my EST class with 5 Ud.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

There are four methods that I have used in collecting data in this study, namely observation, journal writing, questionnaire and interviews with the students concerned.

Observations

Observations were carried out by me since my research partner could not assist as planned due to time constraint and other commitments. I observed the students' abilities to do presentations in class after I have taught them how to do it. These were carried out during every presentation and the data were recorded in a special note-book after each lesson.

Other students who were observing their friends' presentations were also asked to give their comments in the observation sheet as shown in Chart 1. This was done after every presentation. They were also asked to write the main points and the questions they would like to ask.

Presentation	Presenter(s)	Topic	Main points	Questions	Comments
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					

Chart 1: Observation sheet

Interviews

Interviews were carried out with the students after they have done their presentations. The groups were interviewed one at a time. The following 3 questions were given to them to ponder on.

- What did you learn from these presentations?
- Does this technique of doing presentations in class help you to think of EST as less 'exam-oriented'? How?
- What is the most interesting observation you made during all these presentations?

Journal writing

I started this journal writing from the time I decided on the topic until the day I have done my report for this research. This helped me to do my reflection and write my conclusion.

Questionnaire

The following set of questions was prepared and given to students after all the groups have presented. The questions were quite general and open-ended so that students could give their opinions and feelings freely. The following were some of the questions.

- Do you think these presentations have helped you to learn something? If yes, what?
- Do you like this technique of learning and presenting? Why?
- Have you learned anything on Microsoft Power-point through these presentations? If yes, what?
- What do you think of EST? Do you like this subject?
- Do you think EST has helped you to learn more about ICT? Please elaborate.
- Do you think EST can help you in your studies later? Please elaborate.
- Do you think EST is an exam-oriented subject? Please elaborate.

Students were allowed to use either Chinese or Malay language to answer the questions if they found it hard to express in English. Anyway, not many of them did so. Most of them tried their best to answer in English.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is very important for students to realize that what they study in EST is very much associated with the contents in the three pure Science subjects that they are studying. The only difference is that EST is in English but their Physics, Biology and Chemistry are taught in the Malay language. Besides that, I feel that it is important for students to know how to do a good presentation because they need the skill when they go to higher learning institutions later. Most of the students do not have any problem when they are asked to speak in the Malay language, but they do not have confidence speaking in English especially in public. Thus, doing presentations in class using English is a good experience for them. Many of them claimed that they are more confident and brave now.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study is only applicable to my Form 5 Ud class at St. Luke's Secondary School in Sri Aman during that period of time when the study was carried out. It may not be applicable to other classes in other schools at some other time.

THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

The Teaching of Basic Presentation Skills

Presentation is a very important skill for students to learn especially those who are planning to further their studies later. Due to the lack of presentation skills, my students found that even learning using Power-point slides was boring. So I decided to teach them how to do a good presentation using Power-point slides. Chart 2 - Chart 7 are some of the Power-point slides that I used for teaching the said skills on Wednesday, 12 July 2006.

Use a Template

- Use a set font and colour scheme.
- Different styles are disconcerting to the audience.
- You want the audience to focus on what you present, not the way you present.



Chart 2

Fonts

- Choose a clean font that is easy to read.
- Roman and Gothic typefaces are easier to read than *Script* or Old English.
- Stick with one or two types of fonts.



Chart 3

Bullets

- Keep each bullet to one line, two at the most.
- Limit the number of bullets in a screen to six, four if there is a large title, logo, picture, etc.
 - This is known as "cueing"
 - You want to "cue" the audience in on what you are going to say.
 - Cues can be thought of as a brief "preview."
 - This gives the audience a "framework" to build upon.



Chart 4

Capital letters and Italics

- Do not use all capital letters
 - Makes text hard to read
 - Conceals acronyms
 - Denies their use for EMPHASIS
- Italics
 - Used for "quotes"
 - Used to *highlight* thoughts or ideas
 - Used for book, journal, or magazine *titles*



Chart 5

Illustrations

- Use only when needed, otherwise they become distracters instead of communicators
- They should relate to the message and help make a point
- Ask yourself if it makes the message clearer
- Simple diagrams are great communicators

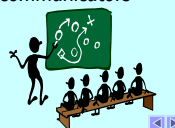


Chart 6

YOU

- Do not use the media to hide you
- The audience came to see you
- The media should enhance the presentation, not BE the presentation
- If all you are going to do is read from the slides or overheads, then just send them the slides
- Remember, only you can make the powerpoint presentations 'alive'.



Chart 7

I explained slide by slide to the students, allowing time for them to ask questions after my explanation on every slide. A couple of the students who are very good in handling the computer seemed to disagree with the slides on font size and colours initially. But after giving them more examples and further explanation, they accepted my points. I took about 20 minutes to explain to them. Besides explaining to them some tips in making good slides, I also exposed them to a few points they must consider when they do their presentation, for example, their eye contact, voice control and others. These I placed under the title 'Basic Communication Skills'.

After I have finished with my explanation, many students asked questions. Some of them even saved my slides for their reference later. Then, I divided them into groups of 4 and asked each of the groups to choose an interesting topic and prepare slides for presentation 2 weeks later. They were asked to choose topics that they thought their friends would be interested in and to apply what I have told them in their preparation of slides. They were told to know their topics in depth so that they would be able to answer the questions raised by their friends later. I asked the group's presenter to rehearse before doing the real presentations. I also offered them the chance for them to test their slides using my laptop.

Many students came to me to ask about the suitability of the topics chosen as well as the slides that they have done before their presentations. This showed clearly that they were really serious about doing good presentations. They were also very eager to present what they have prepared because they kept asking me when would the presentation day be? Since I was quite busy at that time, the presentations were postponed to a week later.

Students' Presentations

During the first week of August, I was around in school. So, I asked them to get ready. I managed to observe all the 7 groups' presentations within the 3 periods of EST that week. I gave them 10 minutes to present and allocated 5 minutes for questions and answers session. I told them earlier that I wanted to see all the members in the group doing the presentation.

I was very glad that they applied what I have taught them though not all of them did. There was a very great improvement on the presentation skills for many of them. That was the first time I heard many of them speaking English in front of the class. It was so amazing! More amazing was that many of them tried their very best to answer the questions posed by their friends. There were lots of interactions between the students in the class during those 3 periods. Chart 8 – Chart 11 are few examples of slides prepared by the students from the second group. They chose 'The Jumeirah & al-Arab Hotel' as their topic of presentation.

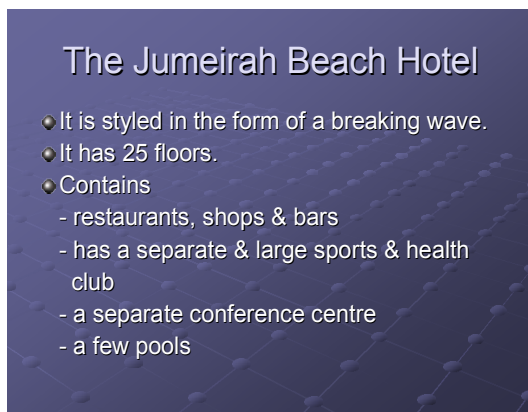


Chart 8

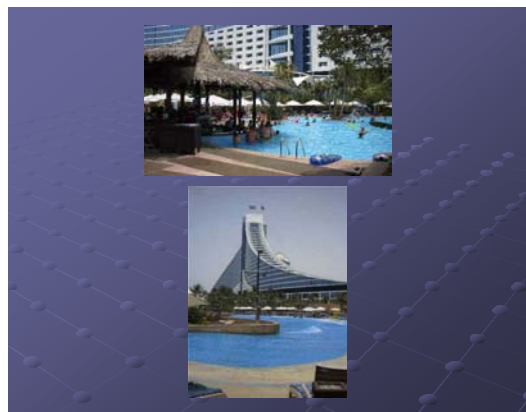


Chart 9

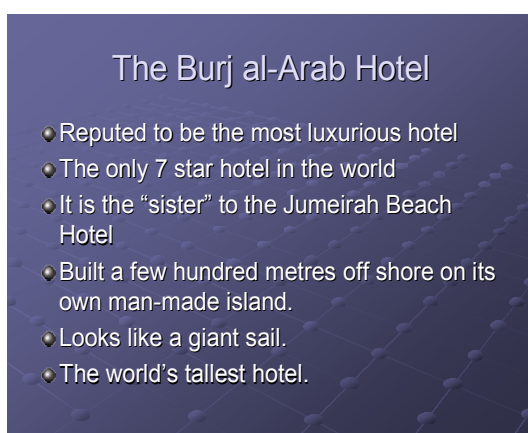


Chart 10



Chart 11

The first group presented on the topic called 'The Iced Hotel'. The group members did it in such a way that their presentation looked very much like an advertisement for the hotel. The presenters tried their best to 'sell' the hotel to their friends and managed to answer all the questions posed to them. I was attracted by their courage and bravery because these few girls have been quiet in class. Some of the students said that they wished to stay in that hotel one day, in future.

The second group chose 'The Jumeirah & al-Arab Hotel' as their topic of presentation. They stunned the listeners when they showed them the beautiful pictures of its under-water restaurant. Many of them expressed their wishes and dream to go there one day. Though the shy presenters did not do their presentation well enough due to their soft voices and shyness, they managed to attract their friends' attention to the beautiful slides that they have prepared.

Group 3 presented the topic on 'Fuel cell Hybrid Bus'. This is a new invention which most of the students still did not know. So they were very interested to know more about the bus. All of them listened attentively to the presentation presented by all the four boys in the group. One thing that really surprised me was that one boy in the group who never spoke to anyone in English before was daring enough to tell jokes in front of everyone and in English! He also tried his best to explain the points he

presented. The group leader is quite fluent in English but he tends to speak very fast. Thus, some of the words could not be heard. The other two were also shy and they only managed to read out the points shown on the slides without much explanation. One of them told me later that he was so nervous that he was not able to sleep the night before!

'Human Reproduction System' was the topic chosen by Group 4. There were four presenters. The first two boys spoke good and fluent English but the other two girls were shy and passive. They only read some of the points from the slides. The problem with this group was that they were too ambitious. They prepared more than 30 slides and their explanation were so detailed that their friends found it boring and difficult to understand. I have to stop them after about 13 minutes. I gave an allowance of 3 minutes to them. No one in the class knew what to ask because they did not understand. So to make the group members felt better, I asked them a question instead. Later I was told by others that only the first presenter knew what he had presented because he did the slides all on his own.

Group 5 presented on a topic that was of special interest to the girls: 'Jewellery'. They showed pictures of many kinds of jewellery from the olden days until now. It was quite interesting even for the boys! All the girls in this group are quite fluent in English though they made quite a number of grammatical errors. They managed to answer the questions posed by their friends too.

The following group chose 'Palm Beach Island' as the topic for their presentation. The leader in this group started with the introduction on the location and structure of the island, followed by the other group members who described what and how the island was formed. The leader is very fluent in English. He is the most active boy in class. The other three members are rather passive and not very fluent in English. They are soft-spoken too. Anyway, they presented their topic well and managed to answer the questions asked though mostly were answered by the group leader.

The last group which consisted of 4 boys presented on 'The Big Bang Theory'. The first two boys are quite fluent and the other two are rather shy. They explained to the class the theory with some examples. Anyway, some girls found it hard to understand. They tried their best to answer the questions given by their friends but I could say that the answers given did not satisfy their friends who asked them. This was because the presenters themselves did not know everything about the theory. They did their slides based on whatever they have gathered from the internet and books.

As a whole, I was very satisfied with the students' presentations and their Power-point slides. They have shown their effort and hard work. The most important thing was that they have used what I have taught them in preparing and doing the presentations.

INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Data were collected through observation, questionnaire, journal writing and group interviews.

My initial plan to do observation with my research partner couldn't be carried out as my research partner was not able to be present on that day though we have planned in advance. In fact, we were supposed to observe the presentations by the students before the stated date but it was postponed a few times due to her many commitments in school. We were not able to find a time suitable for both of us to do observations together. My students helped me one way in another. While one group is presenting, the other students would help to jot down their comments on the observation sheet that I gave them.

For group one, almost the whole class commented that the content was interesting and generally they have presented well. The group leader showed a very good example by her boldness and courage. These could be seen through her clear and loud explanation of the points on the Iced Hotel. She said during the interview that she was glad to be given the chance to speak in class and it was a good experience for her. The second presenter was quite brave too. Though she is not as good as the first one, she presented her best. The only thing that needs to be improved for this group is the voice control of the last two presenters. They were too soft spoken, most probably due to the lack of self-confident and being shy. They looked quite tensed up and at times, could not think of what to say next. I personally feel that the comments given by their friends were true, but I should say that there is still a lot of room for improvement for this group if they plan to further their studies later. I reminded them during the interview that doing presentations in higher learning institutes usually involves marks. Anyway, I am glad that they showed very positive improvement compared to the first presentation.

During the interview with group one, all of them were happy that they were given the chance to speak in public and they admitted they have learnt many things including how to search the internet for the required information, designed Power-point slides and gained a lot of knowledge by listening to other presentations. The group leader said,

"I learn to be brave, gain more knowledge and between friends, better relationship. That was a good chance for me to speak in English since I seldom have the chance to speak in English in public... very good experience."

Responding to the second question, she said,

"Yes,... get our minds off the exam structures and enjoy the topics being presented."

She added later,

"Presentation... I feel happy when our friends gave responses. I seldom speak in class. I don't want our group to lose, we want to win. Don't want to be looked down. I remember teacher said we have to know what we are presenting, so I tried my best to answer the questions raised by friends."

The second presenter also agreed to what her friend has said and she added,

“At least we do not have to do exercises based on the exam format.”

The other three members did not really understand the term ‘exam-oriented’ and they did not give any opinions but to agree with the first two. They told me that was the first time they surfed the net and really learnt how to make slides using Power-point.

The third presenter said,

“I learnt lots of things that I never know before. This is the first time I do Power-point slides. I did not think of the exam format when during presentations.”

The fourth presenter said,

“I know better things happening in this world. Presentations can make us less exam-oriented? Really? Yalah ho.” She looked confused.

The last presenter said very little,

“Co-operation, learnt to do slides.” The rest of the time she just smiled and nodded.

All of them conversed with me in Mandarin because they are so used to it. The first two presenters could speak English quite fluently but they preferred to use Mandarin most probably because they considered the feelings of the other three. The interview was carried out in a very happy and joyous atmosphere. They smiled and laughed a lot.

For group two, the comments given by the students were almost the same as the first group. The girls in this group were generally very quiet and shy. They were also soft-spoken and passive. My observation sheet recorded that too other than comments such as, *“most of them were still reading from the slides though they explained with one or two short phrases or sentences after that”*. They also lacked understanding because at one time, they were pushing each other, not sure who was to present next. The group leader told me during the interview that she was not satisfied with their presentation. If given another chance, they would surely do much better. I advised them not to let go of any opportunity where they could practise their presentation skill.

During the group interview, the group leader said,

“I feel glad because that was the first time I use Power-point slides to present... but during presentation, I don’t feel satisfied because I was nervous and my English is not fluent enough. Anyway, I gained more knowledge. One thing we regretted; we did not know how to answer questions given by our friends.”

The second presenter said to me,

"I was amazed with some of the topics presented, very interesting ad unique."

The third presenter said,

"In my former school, we do presentations even in Form 1. This can increase my knowledge on Microsoft, know my friends better since we worked together... know about other things in other countries, outside Malaysia."

The last two presenters were quite reluctant to speak, they smiled and nodded. This group of girls like to laugh. They seemed to be very proud of what they have presented except for the first presenter. The last two presenters were not as confident as the first three. I gave all of them some word of advice and encouragement.

As for group three, the group leader started the presentation with a sweet smile. He was quite fast in his explanation and some of the words could not be heard clearly. I guess that was his way of hiding his anxiety and nervousness, though he denied it, saying that is his way of speaking. I really salute the second presenter for his ability to tell jokes in front of the class with a big smile though he is not fluent in English. As far as I could remember, I have never heard him talking to me or to anyone else in English before that. He presented his part well, though at times seemed trying hard to explain more clearly. As for the rest of the presenters in this group, it was very obvious that they were very nervous because they were only reading from the slides without any further explanation. Even then, one of them told me during the interview that he did not sleep at all the night before thinking of the presentation that he had to do the following day. The other boy was not able to stand still but swaying from one side to another during the presentation.

The most outstanding boy (the second presenter) said,

"...become more courageous through doing presentations, can face others in class, ... learn more information... that's all."

When I asked him how he came out with the joke, he said it was spontaneous, he did not plan it. He said,

"I like this technique of learning because I can give my own opinions."

The leader of the group said,

"I learn more about power-point, be more creative in designing Power-point slides, learn a lot through searching for information in the internet."

The student who experienced sleepless night said,

“It was a great challenge for me to stand in front of the class and speak in English. I gained lots of knowledge though I admit that I did not understand all the presentations.”

The other boy was absent during the interview. It was so unfortunate that all the three boys were not able to understand the term ‘exam-oriented’. They thought that exam-oriented means there should be exam for this subject. Anyway, they were quite happy with their presentation. The most encouraging thing that I noticed is the second presenter. He has improved especially in his fluency. Though the third presenter read from the slides during presentation, I salute him for his courage and effort.

For group four, it was really a pity for them because their friends said the presentation was boring and difficult to understand. It was too long and with too much detail. They failed to attract the listeners’ interests and attention though the graphics were good. The group leader started well by explaining some basic terms and showed a few pictures. Then, he was so caught up with his presentation that he forgot about the time. The other three members presented only a bit when he took over again. I have to stop him when he seemed to neglect my signals telling him to stop. The other students said the topic was too technical and it is only suitable for medical students! Anyway, they also commented that the first two presenters are fluent but the topic was rather ‘dry’. I shared the same feelings and opinion. I appreciated their effort in preparing such complicated and unique slides but they did not keep to the time allocated. I remembered advising them to select topics that are of interest to the listeners, but the group leader did not take my advice. It was rather hard for him to listen to the opinion of others at times.

The three girls from this group said that generally they have learnt more about computer, gained more knowledge and able to speak English more fluently. One of them added that,

“This presentation has helped to improve my public speaking skill and to know more about science and technology.”

The other two boys said they are more compatible in designing slides and learnt more about computer and English. When asked about whether EST is exam-oriented, one of the boys said,

“No, because what have been learnt through presentations will not be tested in the exam, these presentations were done to gain knowledge, not to pass exam.”

The leader of the group said,

“Doing presentations made me more responsive to questions and to think more. We are the ones asking questions, not the teachers.”

One girl said,

“What we have learnt will not come out in exams. EST is more on language and language skills, not so much on the content.”

The other two girls had nothing to say because they did not really understand the question. The three girls did not reply much during the interview and they seemed not knowing what to say.

For group five, some of the students commented that they should improve on slides preparation. But to me, the slides were acceptable. Maybe they could change the background to a more simpler one instead of using flowers as one. They were said to be too soft-spoken but the content of their presentation was quite interesting. Only the leader of the group could speak loud enough, the rest were so soft that even I found it hard to hear clearly. Other than that, the three girls kept smiling to their friends, trying to make themselves less nervous. The questions asked by their friends were mostly answered by the leader. Even during the interview, they were not able to say much except for the leader.

For the girls in this group, doing presentations have helped them to be more creative, to work closer together, to share ideas and to find information. The group leader said,

“In EST, we not only sit and study, read books... but we can present. Students become more practical, no theory, no need to memorize, just enjoy the presentations. Imagine if for EST, we just do presentations for the exam...best...”

That was a very interesting thing to suggest. Two girls agreed with her idea. One of them said,

“It was like watching television, so much fun and entertaining.”

But the other girl did not agree with the idea because she said,

“... then we have to worry about the results because it is not easy to do presentations using power-point slides.”

The girls in this group like to see the ways their friends' presentation because they were so humorous. They said that most of the topics presented were very interesting.

For group six, the leader had no problem in presenting his part and answering the questions. As for the rest of the group members, they were reading most of the time and their voices were not loud enough too. It was very obvious that they did not know much about the topic. The two girls in this group were merely reading to the class what was written on the slides. The other boy did make an effort to explain a bit. Anyway, the content was interesting and the slides were attractive. The students were attracted by this beautiful island as presented in the slides!

The leader in this group said,

“This technique of learning has helped to improve my research skill and communication skill.”

The rest said they learnt new things, interesting places and computer skills. Talking about whether doing presentations has helped to make EST less exam-oriented, the leader said,

“EST itself is not exam-oriented because we learnt things other than those coming out in exams, such as study skill and doing research.”

The second presenter who was quite responsive said,

“.. there is no text book, no notes and we can learn anything under this subject.”

The other two did not know how to explain. This group seemed to be monopolized by the leader since he is the best student in class and a school debater. The last two presenters kept quiet most of the time until I asked them questions several times.

Some students found the topic presented by group seven quite dull because they presented a topic related to a scientific theory. They were not very familiar with this topic because they only presented what they have gathered through their reading. The first two speakers were quite confident but the last two were totally the opposite. They were so nervous that they could not keep still. Even their voices were shivering! Their presentations were quite short and they looked not well-prepared. Nevertheless, the slides were quite well-prepared.

The boys in this group have become closer through doing presentations. The leader said,

“We really worked as a team; we went to cyber cafe to find materials and after that we went for drinks together, and that was the first time we did that since we became classmates.”

Now, they feel more comfortable using the computer, especially to do Power-point slides. The topic they have chosen helped them to understand the universe better. To them, EST can be about anything. They even said that the more they do presentation, the more they gain and this helped them get ready for exam.

As a whole, I can conclude that the students in this class like doing presentations and they admitted that this technique of learning could really help them when they further their studies later. They were able to practise their presentation skills, do Power-point slides and enhance their skills in doing research. Moreover, they managed to learn more through doing presentations.

REFLECTION

After attending the first session of action research workshop at IPBL where we were asked to decide on a topic for our action research, I was thinking whether I should choose a topic on counselling since I am a full time school counsellor. But on second thoughts, I decided to save that for another time as I noticed that there was something not right with my way of teaching my EST classes. My students seemed to be bored with the exercises I gave them which were usually based on exam format. Very often, I have to stress to them what are the things they have to be careful with if they want to have distinction for EST in SPM. Because of these, some of my students were thinking like me - how to perform well in SPM. When I looked through the curriculum specification for EST again, I realize that the main aim of learning EST is not to get an A in SPM. Students need to learn more about ICT so that they are ready to face the real world. Thus, I thought of ways to break away from the exam-oriented mentality and this should begin from me.

Previously, I have done a few simple presentations in class and I noticed that students showed encouraging responses. I asked them to work in groups and do presentation using transparencies and overhead projector (OHP). I noticed that only a few students dared to speak in front of the class but they did not know how to do good presentation. Other students were not motivated by the presentations using OHP. I decided to give my students a big task to do early 2006. We were discussing on the topic 'Transportation' and I asked them to find materials and information on this topic in groups. They were then required to present using Power-point slides. Some of the groups did very well on slides but not on the presentations. That set me to do something to help them in this.

I was happy that though very busy, I managed to do what I have planned with the students. I taught them how to do good presentations and after that they did presentations in class on some very interesting topics. Through interviews, observations and questionnaire, I found that all the students like this technique of learning. On the other hand, many of them did not understand the term 'exam-oriented'. For those who understood, they admitted that doing presentations in class really helped them to get their minds off the exam structures and they could learn more through sharing on the different topics presented.

Before I started this research, I never thought that students do not understand the term 'exam-oriented'. Even with very detailed explanation and examples, many of them still did not understand the real meaning. They got the impression that 'exam-oriented' means that there should be examination or some kind of assessment for EST at the end of the year. Maybe they do know the meaning but they just do not know how to explain.

As I carried out this research, one question that keeps lingering on my mind. Is EST still necessary to be taught in schools since students in upper secondary classes are learning their Science subjects in English (PPSMI)? On second thought, I think it is still necessary because EST is more on the language while PPSMI emphasizes on

the content. Thus, in a way, they compliment each other. Through learning EST, students may be able to understand their Science subjects better. Actually, that was the hope of some of my students. They said that hopefully EST would help their juniors (the current Form 4 students who are studying Science and Mathematics subjects in English) to learn better.

From this study, I would say that doing presentations in class not only captured the students' attention and interest, it could also help students to practise other skills like doing research, taking notes, designing slides, communicating with others publicly and answering questions. Thus, this technique of learning is highly recommended; not only for EST but also for other subjects.

I used to think that it was a waste of time and energy to set up all the equipments like laptop and LCD projector because I was not very good at it. But now, my perception is completely different! It is not because now I more skilful in handling the equipment, but from my students' reactions and responses, I think it is really worthwhile to use those equipment. The satisfaction that my students and I obtained after the lessons was really great! I am thinking of upgrading myself in handling the ICT equipments and to improve my knowledge on doing presentations that audiences preferred.

Very often, as teachers, we think that we are doing everything we can for the good and benefit of our students. Our goal is to help them score well in examinations. With this in mind, we try our very best to make sure that they pass with flying colours in examinations, not knowing that we have neglected their opinions and feelings. In my case, I think I was the one who caused the students to have the exam-oriented mentality with my techniques of teaching. With the dull and boring looks on their faces, I am glad that I managed to realize my mistake and found a way to rectify that. At least now, I am very sure that my students will not remember me as an 'exam-oriented' teacher but one who has tried to bring fun and enjoyment in learning EST.

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