
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Developing English Communication Competence through Oral Presentations: A Qualitative Study of Secondary School Students in Morocco

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| ABSTRACT

Developing English communication competence has emerged as a fundamental priority in foreign language acquisition, notably at the secondary education level, where students are required to communicate successfully at school and in real-life environments. However, despite ongoing teaching/learning strategies, secondary school learners continue to face challenges in communicating fluently in English and expressing their ideas confidently. Insufficient opportunities for authentic classroom communication may be one cause of these difficulties. The present research explores the significance of classroom oral presentations as a pedagogical approach for building English communication abilities among secondary students. The study aims to understand how systematic oral presentations effectively enhance learners' ability in communication, critical thinking, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical use. This contribution is grounded in Richards (2006) Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which prioritizes meaningful and effective communication as the fundamental target of language acquisition, viewing language learning as a process of interaction and engagement. The study employs a qualitative approach, drawing on classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with second-year baccalaureate learners, and evaluation of classroom oral presentations in a Moroccan public secondary school. The findings of this research demonstrated that the participants face multiple challenges hindering the development of their communication skills. It also showed that oral presentation-based education effectively encourages students' English communication abilities by enhancing their self-confidence, correct pronunciation, critical thinking, and interaction. It showed that students feel motivated and free to use their English effectively during their class oral presentations. This research concludes that implementing regular oral presentation activities into English classes provides authentic opportunities for learners to strengthen their overall English communication skills. The study contributes to existing literature by providing evidence on the significance of implementing regular oral presentations in encouraging students' English communication skills. It further provides practical instructions for incorporating systematic oral presentations into high school education to generate a more effective educational environment.

| KEYWORDS

English communication competence, Oral presentations, Secondary education, Morocco

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

In today's interconnected world, English has emerged as the dominant language for global communication, education, and scientific research. English has become a widely used lingua franca; proficiency in this language equips learners with specific tools to engage successfully in intercultural relationships. In the Moroccan context, English continues to gain prominence as a widely used language (Jebbour, 2021). Therefore, enhancing English communication skills has become a key priority in teaching English, particularly at the high school level, where learners start constructing the linguistic and communicative basics important for lifelong acquisition and global engagement.

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Developing communication skills in English encompasses students' capacity to listen, speak, read, and write so that they can understand, interpret, and transmit various meanings adequately within multiple sociocultural contexts. Unlike classical teaching approaches that primarily concentrate on grammatical and memorization competencies, contemporary language education approaches emphasize the importance of enhancing "communicative competence". Hymes (1972) argues that this concept extends beyond language knowledge by assuring that effective communication requires not only a strong background in grammatical rules but also the ability to use language appropriately in relation to the context of communication and the people involved in the interaction.

High school education represents a critical stage in language acquisition because students develop the social and cognitive abilities to engage in collaborative and interactive learning opportunities and experiences. During this educational stage, high school students begin to express their ideas, opinions, and meanings. They become increasingly able to solve problems and take part in classroom discussions using English as a communicative medium. Despite these educational abilities, high school learners continue to encounter various challenges to improving their English communication skills. Common challenges may include low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and a lack of opportunities to use English appropriately. These challenges have been intensified by educational practices that emphasize grammatical correctness over communication competencies (MacIntyre, Clement, Dornyei & Noels, 1998).

Enhancing English communication skills among high school learners has become an essential priority for fostering students' personal development and academic achievements. Acquiring strong communication skills not only advances students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing but also enhances their creativity, intercultural comprehension, and critical thinking (Richards, 2006). Furthermore, effective communication skills in English can encourage students to engage more actively in classroom activities and develop self-confidence in using English during classroom discussions (Harmer, 2015). Therefore, teachers need to implement learner-centered communicative pedagogies that can provide students with the necessary skills to practice English more effectively (Canale & Swain, 1980; Brown, 2015).

However, despite their endeavor to develop their educational skills, many high school students continue to encounter various challenges in using their English in Moroccan public-school contexts. While existing scholarship has extensively explored English language acquisition and development, limited research has been afforded to the specific communication challenges, needs, and factors that shape the enhancement of their communicative skills. Consequently, the present study aims to answer the following questions: (i) What are the major Major Communication Challenges that high school students face while developing their English communication skills? (ii) What are significant factors and needs affecting these learners' English communication skills? (iii) In what ways do oral presentations promote second-year baccalaureate students' English communication skills?

2. Literature Review

Gimenez (2019) argues that learning communication skills effectively goes beyond linguistic correctness to include other competencies, including but not limited to problem-solving, collaboration, and intercultural awareness. The author advocates task-oriented learning practices that can empower learners to communicate authentically in their future professional contexts. The author supports a competency-based method that combines language learning with the acquisition of professional skills rather than viewing language learning as an isolated medium. The author provides significant teaching/learning strategies and assessment techniques that can help teachers combine workplace-related communication skills with classroom academic activities. Gimenez (2019) stresses the importance of pedagogical techniques and classroom practices that bridge the gap between English instruction and communication skills needed in professional settings, highlighting students' autonomy as a vital role in enhancing English communication progress.

Hargie (2021) describes communication skills as the capabilities to get, interpret, and convey information effectively using spoken and written language and other non-verbal forms, while adjusting to various social and professional settings. These abilities include expressing ideas, asking adequate questions, and enhancing effective social interaction. According to Richmond et al. (2016), communication skills refer to the knowledge and abilities to receive, produce, transmit, and interpret effectively various messages to accomplish communicative objectives and construct meaningful interpersonal relations. In addition, Gimenez (2019) defines communication skills as the combination of linguistic proficiency, critical thinking, and intercultural comprehension that enables learners to communicate effectively within professional settings.

Drawing on these definitions, communication skills can be comprehended as a broad combination of interrelated and integrated abilities that enhance individuals' power to receive, understand, interpret, and transmit various modes of communication. These communication abilities involve the employment of intercultural and interpersonal competencies to achieve effective interactions

in multiple socio-cultural and professional environments. This multidimensional comprehension is significantly relevant to understanding English communication skills in an educational context, such as high school life, where students are expected to build linguistic competences while simultaneously using English adequately in a variety of communicative and interactive contexts.

Nunan's (2015) study explains that learners can build communication skills more effectively when they participate in authentic task-based practices that reflect real-life interactive settings. Nunan (2015) explains that implementing task-based activities in English language learning can encourage learners to express themselves, share ideas, and exchange information with their peers. According to the author, by incorporating these activities, learners simultaneously develop their listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities and, overall, their language communication skills. As Nunan (2015) argues, in secondary education, task-centered pedagogies encourage learners to learn English for effective communication, shifting the priority from merely memorizing vocabulary and grammatical rules to acquiring and practicing language acquisition skills in meaningful contexts.

Furthermore, Brown and Lee (2015) highlight the role of language interactive practices in the development of learners' communication skills. For the authors, these practices enable students to engage actively in communication and participation settings, promoting these students' confidence and critical thinking. The authors further argue that effective classroom interactions can encourage learners' academic and social communicative abilities. Brown and Lee's (2015) learning approach is specifically relevant to developing English communication skills among high school students. This student-centered approach provides educational settings with effective techniques for teaching English communication skills in realistic environments.

The acquisition and development of language communication skills can be shaped by multiple interrelated personal, linguistic, and socio-cultural factors. Research indicates that communication competences are not merely determined by students' grasp of linguistic structures; rather, they are shaped by students' learning confidence, classroom context, pedagogical techniques, and opportunities for classroom interaction. Brown and Lee (2015) identify learner motivation and classroom interaction as key contributors to the development of communicative competence in language. They explain that learners who demonstrate an important desire to communicate in English and who actively engage in collaborative classroom activities are more likely to build communication skills. Brown and Lee explain that oral presentations, classroom pair work, and classroom discussion are the most important tools to enhance English communication abilities. Conversely, the authors argue that instructor-led instruction and limited participation opportunities are likely to restrict students' ability to develop meaningful communication skills.

Still another factor is that Harmer (2015) demonstrated that psychological obstacles such as learners' fear of making mistakes, learners' interaction anxiety, and learners' low self-confidence can discourage effective communication. Harmer (2015) suggests that teachers should implement supportive and welcoming classroom environments in which their students feel at ease and can share their ideas without concern about being criticized or negatively judged. Such educational contexts encourage students' ability, willingness, and confidence to engage effectively in communication activities.

Furthermore, a study by Canale and Swain (1980) argues that multiple socio-cultural factors can impact students' language communication performances. For these authors, effective and meaningful communication is not based only on learners' acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical rules but also includes socio-linguistic competencies and discourse contexts, allowing students to use language that varies according to their socio-cultural and contextual environments.

3. Theoretical Framework

As it situates communication abilities at the core of language instruction, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) serves as the basic element in the theoretical framework of this paper. Conversely, unlike conventional teaching approaches that focus primarily on acquiring grammatical rules and vocabulary memorization, CLT developed during the 1970s as an alternative, viewing language as a medium for effective communication and interaction. CLT draws its theoretical basis from Hymes' (1972) conception of 'communicative competence', which explains that meaningful communication requires not only linguistic correctness but also the competence to use language effectively in various socio-cultural and communicative contexts.

CLT principles were further developed by Richards (2006), who explains that the fundamental role of language instruction is to allow learners to communicate meaningfully and provide them with authentic communicative contexts. According to Richards (2006), the basic target of English language instruction is to encourage students' communicative abilities rather than just build their grammatical correctness. For Richards (2006), the classroom environment should encourage students to share ideas and opinions, collaborate, solve problems, and negotiate meaning through effective communication mediums.

Richards insists that language communication skills are promoted when learners engage in meaningful, interactive classroom practices such as collaborative projects, role plays, classroom discussions, and problem-solving activities. For Richards, these

communicative settings enable students to employ their English purposefully. Richards (2008) argues that building communication skills through learner-centered pedagogies may create opportunities for students to develop communicative confidence not only in classroom contexts but also in other environments outside the school setting.

The principles of Communicative Language Teaching construct the theoretical framework for understanding how high school students develop English language communication skills. The implementation of the principles of Richards' (2006) CLT is likely to be constrained by multiple elements such as limited teaching time, official pedagogical instructions, and learners' group size. Richards' (2008) teaching approach offers a comprehensive teaching framework for this paper, as it prioritizes real-life communication and active, integrative participation to enhance communication skills in teaching English. Accordingly, this contribution adopts Richards' (2006) Communicative Language Teaching perspective as the theoretical tool to explore how secondary school students develop communication skills during their English classes.

4. Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative approach to examine the effectiveness of implementing oral presentations in developing learners' English communication skills in Moroccan public high schools. The study employed a purposive sampling design to select participants, comprising mainly 60 high school students (30 males and 30 females) at the second-year Baccalaureate level who regularly prepare oral presentations as part of their English classes, the lessons appearing in the units of students' books. A qualitative design was adopted to develop an in-depth understanding of the participants' perceptions and engagement in classroom practices related to oral presentations. The exploration of communication skills development through oral presentations was guided by Richards' (2006) theoretical perspective of Communicative Language Teaching.

Multiple qualitative methods were used to guarantee the richness and credibility of the results. Data were gathered through non-participant classroom observations to explore the learners' engagement in oral participation. Additionally, semi-structured interviews and evaluation of students' oral presentations were conducted to gather the study's findings. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a group of second-year high school students to examine the influence of classroom oral presentations on students' language fluency, vocabulary learning, self-confidence, and discussions. The gathered information was analyzed thematically to understand recurring themes highlighting the role of oral presentation in the development of learners' English communication skills among second-year baccalaureate students at a public institution.

5. Findings and Discussions

5.1 Major Communication Challenges

The study's findings demonstrated that despite the importance of oral presentations in enhancing English communication skills, second-year baccalaureate students at Lahcen Ben Mohamed Ben M'barek high school continue to face multiple challenges that unfortunately hinder the good development of English communication skills through their oral presentations. Frequently identified obstacles include low confidence in English speaking, difficulties with English pronunciation, and fear of making errors. Non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews showed that high school learners expressed fear and anxiety when performing oral presentations, largely due to fear of being criticized by their instructor and/or peers. These findings align with Harmer's (2015) research, which demonstrated that low self-confidence often hinders learners' effectiveness during oral presentations. Similarly, a study by Brown and Lee (2015) found that students' eagerness to engage in communication activities is influenced by their level of self-confidence and the classroom setting, which supports oral presentation performers.

The study also found that many participants reported other communication challenges such as limited vocabulary, which restricts their ability to perform well in their oral presentations. These findings support Nunan (2015), who insists that students develop communication skills more effectively when they engage in authentic task-based activities that reflect real-life interactive settings. The author explains that employing task-based practices in English learning encourages learners to share ideas and exchange information. By employing these activities, students simultaneously develop their listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities. As Nunan (2015) argues, in secondary education, task-centered approaches allow learners to learn English for effective communication, shifting the priority from merely memorizing grammatical rules to acquiring and practicing language skills in meaningful situations.

Despite these challenges, non-participation observation and assessment showed that the participants gradually developed self-confidence, vocabulary use, and speaking fluency through regular involvement in classroom oral presentations. These results demonstrated that oral communication obstacles should be considered as developmental stages rather than permanent classroom

challenges. The study found that effective and regular participation in oral presentations builds students' self-confidence and willingness to engage in classroom discussions. The study found that fostering student-centered classroom activities, such as speaking opportunities and oral tasks, can enhance learners' communication skills in English classes.

5.2 Factors Affecting English Communication Skills

The findings of this paper revealed that although regular oral presentations serve as a significant and effective instructional method for enhancing English communication abilities, multiple determinants continue to influence the participants' English communication capabilities. Among the most important obstacles reported were fear of committing mistakes. Many participants claimed that they experience anxiety when performing in front of their peers during their oral presentations as they are concerned about being criticized. The findings of this research showed that those participants who encountered these challenges experienced anxiety that affected their self-confidence and desire to perform effectively in classroom oral practices.

The findings of this study are consistent with Harmer's (2015) research, which indicates that psychological barriers such as fear of making mistakes, interaction anxiety, and low self-confidence are likely to discourage students from building effective communication skills. Harmer suggests that instructors should foster a supportive and welcoming classroom setting in which learners feel secure and comfortable sharing their ideas without concern about criticism or negative judgment. Such classroom conditions enhance learners' ability, willingness, and confidence to communicate actively. Additionally, Canale and Swain (1980) explain that different socio-cultural factors may shape students' language communication abilities. For the authors, meaningful communication is not based only on students' acquisition of grammatical rules but also includes socio-linguistic and discourse competencies, allowing learners to comprehend that language use varies according to socio-cultural and contextual environments.

Despite these challenges, the majority of the participants acknowledged that regular oral activities such as oral presentations gradually encourage them to take part in these educational activities. The teacher's evaluation of the participants' classroom oral performance showed that repeated engagement in oral tasks progressively reduces students' fear and anxiety and promotes their pronunciation and fluency. Classroom non-participant observation showed that those participants who feel confident during their oral presentations express their desire to participate in future English oral presentations. The findings of this study support those of Richards (2008), who found that systematic participation in classroom communicative practices such as oral presentations can gradually develop learners' communicative competence.

5.3 Major Communication Needs

The findings of this paper demonstrated that classroom oral presentations play a significant role in the development of students' English communication skills, while also highlighting that these educational practices address important communication needs of the participants. The study outcomes indicated that the respondents identified multiple communication needs important for encouraging their English communication skills. Data collection tools showed that oral presentations provide the participants with major opportunities to employ English in classroom oral presentations. The informants acknowledged that regular presentation practices allow them to improve their self-confidence and express themselves easily.

The participants also highlighted the need for teacher support, a good classroom setting, and repeated communication practices to further develop their speaking and expressive activities. The participants emphasized the importance of regular classroom practices such as oral presentations to use their English and communicate with their classmates. The participants reported that they need more communication activities as they feel that their speaking abilities are progressing. They acknowledge that during these classroom practices, they interact with their peers, express their thoughts, and communicate with confidence.

The researcher's classroom observation and evaluation of students' oral presentations demonstrated that oral presentation activities enabled the participants to interact with the classroom audience. In this regard, the majority of the participants highlighted the need to engage in organized communication-based activities such as oral presentations and communicate with large audiences that include other classes. The findings of this research are largely consistent with Richards' (1983) research, which emphasized that language instruction can yield successful results if it is implemented by taking into consideration students' communicative needs instead of focusing solely on grammatical construction.

Additionally, a recent study conducted by Dewaele and Li (2021) showed that students' interaction and communication needs are significantly addressed when the teacher implements learner-centered instruction that makes communication opportunities available. A study by Gimenez (2019) emphasized that regular speaking practices increase learners' communication abilities, classroom collaboration, and interaction with the audience.

Generally, the study found that oral presentations constitute a significant pedagogical technique for enhancing learners' communicative ability by affording opportunities for effective language manipulation. In contrast to traditional pedagogical techniques that focus on mechanical memorization of grammar and vocabulary, oral communication activities enable learners to use English as a second language to express themselves, exchange ideas and thoughts, and engage in discussions with their peers and teachers. Through regular classroom practices such as oral presentations, students can develop their communicative abilities while using their grammatical and vocabulary knowledge. Moreover, regular participation in oral activities offers both participants and the audience the opportunity to maintain interactional abilities, such as expressing lack of understanding, asking for clarification, giving examples and illustrations, and managing communicative disruptions. Consequently, regular incorporation of oral activities and, more particularly, oral presentations in classroom practices contributes largely to students' ability to move beyond learning English as a mere linguistic construction toward the competence to use English effectively in communicative and interactive settings.

6. Conclusion

This contribution examined how classroom oral activities, particularly oral presentations, enhance students' English communication skills. The outcomes of this study demonstrated that classroom oral presentations constitute an outstanding pedagogical tool for encouraging secondary school learners' communication competencies. The study's data collection tools demonstrated that conducting regular oral-based activities enabled participants to build self-confidence, express fluency, engage in discussion, and develop critical thinking. This research reinforces the principles of Richards (2006) Communicative Language Teaching perspective, which advocates meaningful and interactive communication as primordial to language learning.

The study also emphasized the authenticity of oral communication in encouraging learners' English communication skills, self-expression, collaboration, and confidence.

Despite these outstanding results, the findings also showed that second-year baccalaureate students in Moroccan public schools continue to face multiple challenges in their use of English, including low self-confidence, pronunciation obstacles, fear of making mistakes, and concerns about being assessed negatively by their peers. These obstacles suggest that English communication skills among second-year baccalaureate students develop steadily, requiring sustained efforts to create effective communicative opportunities. More than that, these obstacles suggest that learners' communicative abilities need effective practice in an encouraging classroom setting.

Therefore, English language instructors need to encourage student-centered pedagogies and suitable classroom contexts that incorporate regular, effective oral activities where learners communicate and interact with their teachers and peers. Despite providing significant insights into the use of oral presentations in building oral English communication skills. This research shows multiple limitations that should be considered when reading and interpreting its outcomes. The research relies mainly on qualitative information, concentrating on the respondents' perceptions and learning experiences instead of using quantitative tools to measure participants' English communicative development. As a qualitative study, it was carried out in a single Moroccan public secondary institution with a relatively limited number of respondents, which is likely to influence the generalizability of the outcomes to other educational settings.

Future contributions should take these limitations into consideration by incorporating larger and more representative numbers of participants from multiple educational institutions. Future research should also employ different data-gathering approaches to examine the role of oral presentations in the development of learners' English communicative abilities across various educational contexts. Future research endeavors are encouraged to examine the incorporation of digital tools to understand the effectiveness of oral activities in enhancing English communication skills in Moroccan secondary education.

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