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Speaking Out from the Heart: Empowering Algerian EFL Students through Oral Presentations of Free Type

التعبير من القلب: تمكين طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية الجزائريين من خلال العروض الشفوية الحرة

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Abstract:
The present paper investigates the role of oral presentations of free type in fostering empowerment among EFL undergraduates in an oral comprehension and production course at the Department of English of Algiers 2 University. The study employed a mixed methods design by integrating an adapted learner empowerment questionnaire with students' reflective forms. The results indicate that free-type oral presentations incorporated into teaching tasks could significantly enhance students' empowerment while shedding light on some of the possible challenges stemming from students' performance difficulties and perceived instructors' roles. The findings provide practical recommendations for interactive oral classes that could help students take responsibility for their learning and trigger learning beyond the university setting.

Keywords: Learner empowerment ; oral presentations ; engagement ; autonomy ; instructor's role.

ملخص:

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية دور العروض الشفوية الحرة في تعزيز تمكين طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في مقرر فهم وإنتاج اللغة الشفوية بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة الجزائر 2. استخدمت الدراسة منهجية بحثية مختلطة، حيث دمجت استبيانًا مُعدَّلًا لتمكين المتعلم مع نماذج تأملية من إعداد الطلاب.

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تشير النتائج إلى أن العروض الشفوية الحرة المدمجة في المهام التعليمية تُسهم بشكل كبير في تعزيز تمكين الطلاب، مع تسليط الضوء على بعض التحديات المحتملة الناجمة عن صعوبات الأداء لدى الطلاب وتصوراتهم لأدوار الأستاذة. تُقدِّم النتائج توصيات عملية لصفوف شفوية تفاعلية تُساعد الطلاب على تحمُّل مسؤولية تعلُّمهم وتُحفِّز التعلُّم خارج نطاق الجامعة.

كلمات مفتاحية: تمكين المتعلم؛ العروض الشفوية؛ المشاركة؛ الاستقلالية؛ دور الأستاذ.

1. INTRODUCTION

When teachers incorporate oral presentations in the classroom, they provide students with opportunities to practise the language. As an important classroom technique, oral presentation fosters cooperation and collaboration between group members. When students are involved to initiate their own learning through presentation, namely based on their topics selection, they are likely to be empowered.

When delivering oral presentations, many students might encounter considerable difficulties due to linguistic and pedagogical aspects. Researchers like Keo ,Lan, Sam, and Rouet (2025) suggested that students struggle with limited language knowledge, reduced class participation, limited practice, and weak listening skills.

This study sought to explore EFL students' perceptions of giving oral presentations of a free type. The study is based on the researcher's teaching experience of allowing students to occasionally choose their own topics and group members in the oral comprehension and production course of third-year classes for the sake of increasing engagement and autonomy. By identifying the advantages of free oral representation, the study aims to examine students' empowerment and their overall learning experiences. The study sought to answer the following research questions :

1- How do EFL students perceive oral presentations of free type ?

2- To what extent could oral presentations influence students' empowerment in oral classes ?

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2. Review of the literature

2.1 EFL Speaking and Oral Presentations

In a higher university setting, speaking ranks amongst the most important skills for EFL students. Despite its importance, it might be challenging as it requires an extensive degree of self-expression on the part of language learners. To bridge the gap, instructors might incorporate oral presentations to increase learners' inclusion and practice. Such classroom practice can be helpful as it improves vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, coherence and public speaking skills (Nguyen & Ly,2025).

In teacher-centred classrooms, students could be disengaged and and less motivated (Maulina, 2024). Oral presentations of free type could be a beneficial alternative for language educators as they boost learners' sense of empowerment. Oral presentations play a crucial role at university levels where the goal is to develop learners' speaking proficiency (Keo et al., 2025). The practice is a prerequisite for students to effectively verbalize their ideas. English is not only used for academic purposes but also for other broader communicative needs (Heng, 2017).

2.2 Learner empowerment in higher education

Learner empowerment as a construct is defined as a mental state in which "a learner finds the tasks meaningful, feels competent to perform them, and feels his/her efforts have an impact on the scheme of things" (Frymier et al.,1996, p. 183).Empowerment as a multi-dimensional concept has three interrelated dimensions : meaningfulness, competence, and impact. According to Houser and Frymier (2009), meaningfulness has to do with with the degree to which the learner finds the course engaging. Competence pertains to the learners' evaluation of their ability to perform the necessary activities to achieve the desired objectives. The final component refers to the learners' perceptions of the influence on the learning process. The three dimensions could positively affect the learners' academic

engagement and provide additional efforts to pursue the desired results and expectations.

In higher education, empowerment is the practice of supporting learners to shape their learning and study for a sustainable future ((Sewagegn & Diale, 2019).

As an essential dimension of language learning success, empowerment is referred to as a state in which learners feel competent as they have an impact on the learning process (Ledbetter & Finn,2016). Learners are expected to be more effective and creative when instructors empower them. Such empowered learners become highly engaged, work harder, and strive for a better performance (Sewagegn & Diale, 2019). Empowerment is not just a matter of learner- centredness ; it goes beyond that scope with the aim of equipping learners with the skills necessary for ultimate future challenges. Learners' sense of empowerment can deepen the feelings of learners' responsibility and prepare them for social roles within their communities of practice practice, such as taking initiative roles in specific group projects or contributing to social activities. In class, students are most engaged and empowered when they are involved in activities that they find interesting and exciting. Students feel involved in such tasks and cannot wait to share their work with their classmates and teachers (Mai & Liang, 2021).

3. Methodology

In the present study, the participants were thirty EFL students (six males and twenty- four females) at the English department of Algiers 2 University. The participants were students of the oral production and comprehension course of third-year common base classes. A mixed-method design was chosen for the study .To measure learners' empowerment, a modified Learner Empowerment Questionnaire (LEQ) was administered (Frymier et al., 1996) . The questionnaire consists of thirty items varying in responses from A (Agree) to D (Disagree) , and U(Undecided) adjusted for the sake of the study. The students' answers were collected in class after a phase of the LEQ piloting. A second step in the study was to include the students' reflection form as a qualitative component to depict learners' perspectives on oral presentations of free type and sense of empowerment .

4. Results and discussion

The mixed-methods design helped to combine the yielded descriptive statistics with the students' narratives of the reflective forms. The data gathered through the learner empowerment questionnaire (LEQ) provided insights into the impact of oral presentations on learners' empowerment. The results obtained from the

questionnaire reveal that many of the students endorsed positively statements indicative of empowerment as presented in table 1 :

Statements of the LEQ	Number of Responses	Percentage
3. The oral class is consistent with my values.	24	80 %
9. I work hard for class because I want to, not because I have to.	23	76 ,7%
10. I have a choice in the methods I can use to perform my work.	23	76 ,7%

Table 1 : Overall students' sense of empowerment

It is apparent from table 1 that most of the participants (80%) consider the oral class consistent with their values as they are able to participate to activities relevant to successful outcomes (item 3). Many subjects (76,7%) refer to the fact that they are intrinsically motivated to work hard for class through item (9) "I work hard for class because I want to, not because I have to", not as a result of forcing them to do so. Likewise, over two-thirds of the subjects (76, 7%) referred to the choice of performing in class (item 10) "I have a choice in the methods I can use to perform my work".

Apart from the overall results on items revealing empowerment that received a highest endorsement, the detailed analysis of the questionnaire and the reflective form findings helped to answer the research questions. the data are grouped into major categories that focus on self-efficacy, learner autonomy, engagement, task meaningfulness, teachers influence, and classroom challenges .

4.1 EFL students' perceptions of oral presentations

The results of the study showed that the majority of the students perceived oral presentations as one of the helpful pedagogical tools enhancing their communicative competence.

As shown in table 2 more than two-thirds of the subjects (80%) expressed that they are self confident in their capacities to perform in class (item 30), and

twenty students (66,7%) expressed that they possessed the required speaking skills (item 20). Self-efficacy was also shown through responses to statement (1), with more than half of the subjects (63, 3%) feeling confidence that they can perform the requested duties in class:

Statements of the LEQ	A	%	D	%	U	%
30. I am able to perform the necessary activities to succeed in my class.	24	80%	0	0%	6	20.0%
20. I possess the necessary skills to perform successfully in class.	18	60%	4	13.3%	8	26.7%
1. I feel confident that I can adequately perform my duties in my oral class.	19	63.3%	4	13.3%	7	23.3%

Table 2 : Students' self-efficacy and communicative competence

The qualitative findings were also significant as students reported improvement in speaking ability as one explained I" improved my speaking skill by giving presentations as it helped me formulate better sentences and improve the way I communicate my ideas to listeners. I feel that I am more capable of speaking clearly and present well"(S3) , and overcoming difficulties : "It helps me to improve my English in front of my classmates. It helps me to solve the problem of being ashamed from talking and speaking in front of people" (S5). As suggested in the literature (Nguyen & Ly,2025) , oral presentations can aid students perform better and enrich levels of self-efficacy. In this study, students are likely responsive to self-improvement as they gradually develop self-efficacy and oral skills.

Although the oral presentations of free type were considered as empowering and self-efficacy nurturing by the majority of the subjects, some other participants suggested that such presentations could influence the classroom climate, teacher's role, and create challenges. The results are summarized in table 3 below :

Statements of the LEQ	A	%	D	%	U	%
17. My instructor believes that he or she must control how I do my work.	13	43,30	11	36.7%	6	20.0%
18. Expressing my own attitudes and ideas is rewarded in my class.	11	36.7%	8	26.7%	11	36.7%
15. My instructor allows flexibility in the way I perform my tasks.	17	56,7%	6	20.0%	7	23.3%

Table 3 : Teacher's role and classroom challenges

Some of the students believed that teachers could have a detrimental impact in shaping their classroom experiences. About half of the participants (43,30%) felt that teachers must control work item (17), while other subjects (60%) said that expressing their ideas was rewarded (item18) . For item (15) "My instructor allows flexibility in the way I perform my tasks", more than half of the the students (56,7%) agreed that their teacher allowed flexibility in class. In the reflective forms, the respondents revealed such concerns that might hinder the whole improvement process namely for students with some difficulties. The following extracts depict such hurdles : S4"I did not like standing up and talk in front of others for an extended period of time. I do not like being stared at and be the center of attention.", and S9 "I do not like presenting with all my classmates. I forget everything and make a lot of mistakes". Those instances display that oral presentations within group members could be complex and require careful selection prior to the oral class session. It seems that while many of the students expressed comfort around speaking presentations, others were shown to struggle and show signs of discomfort commonly translated into forgetfulness, shyness, and withdrawal from classroom interaction .

4.2 Students' empowerment in oral classes

To answer the second research question meant to focus on students' empowerment as influenced by free oral presentations, the results are discussed within the framework of learning empowerment components. Within this scope, the

subsequent results and findings are grouped to reflect dimensions of meaningfulness, engagement, and competence, as well as impact and learners' perceptions.

Statements of the LEQ	A	%	D	%	U	%
11. The tasks required in my class are personally meaningful.	20	66.7%	6	20.0%	4	13.3%
27. The tasks required by my class are valuable to me.	17	56,7%	4	13.3%	9	30.0%
29. I agree with the meaning my instructor has for what good performance on class work is.	9	30.0%	1	3.3%	20	66.7%

Table 4: Students' sense of meaningfulness in oral tasks

The questionnaire results, as can be observed in table 4 highlight students' recognition of the oral tasks done in class. Statement (11) was highly endorsed by the participants as twenty students (66,7%) agreed that the tasks were personally meaningful to them. Similarly, more than half of the subjects (56,7%) found the tasks valuable to them. For the last statement of this category, only a third (33,3%) of the subjects agreed with the instructor's meaning of good performance while 66,7% remained undecided about the last option : "I agree with the meaning my instructor has for what good performance on class work is" (item 29). .This high degree of uncertainty on the part of the subjects indicates that the criteria of evaluation and assessment is better understood when teachers provide sufficient clarification in advance. It is important to equip students with the necessary tools to value their learning and understand their attained level of progress.

Additionally, the respondents' answers of the reflective forms showed that when presentations were based on personal choice selections, the tasks were considered as valuable and appealing. The notion of task performance is echoed in one of the students' answers : "The thing that I like the most about oral presentations is the liberty to choose whatever topic we want .I believe that talking about a topic that resonates with us spiritually and intellectually is excellent"(S8).

Besides meaningfulness as one of the perspectives of learner empowerment, engagement appeared as one of the major aspects. Responses relative to engagement and motivation are presented in table 5 below :

Statements of the LEQ	A	%	D	%	U	%
25. I find my class to be interesting.	18	60%	3	10%	9	30.0%
16. I look forward to going to my class.	17	56,7%	6	20.0%	7	23.3%

Table 5: Students' engagement

As shown in table 5, many of the students (60%) endorsed positively item (25) "I find my class to be interesting", and more than half of the subjects (56, 7%) agreed with statement (16) as they referred to looking forward to attend the oral class. Likewise, the qualitative data of the reflection forms confirm that oral presentations given in class have fostered engagement levels in students. Some of the respondents expressed enthusiasm and personal involvement as displayed in the following extracts :

S3:"I enjoyed the fact that topics were not imposed on us because it allowed us to pick something we were truly interested in. Talking about something you are interested in, will make the presentation easier. It will run smoothly."

S4: "Engaging in conversations and discuss different ideas and opinions is very helpful. A presentation helps us border our horizon and gain new perspectives . It allows us to perceive the world differently."

S9: "I like giving presentations because it makes me feel confident especially with my classmates. It helps a lot to learn and practice the language."

As theorised by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009),some classroom activities are likely to create meaningful learning and increase engagement for language learners.

Another component of empowerment to be considered is impact and learners' perceptions. Within this category items on autonomy and choice are dealt with

accordingly. Table 6 summarizes the results relative to the aforementioned category :

Statements of the LEQ	A	%	D	%	U	%
26. I can be creative in the way I perform the tasks required in my class.	19	63,3%	3	10%	8	26.7%
21. My success in this class is under my control.	20	66,7%	4	13.3%	6	20.0%

Table 6: The impact of learner autonomy

Presumably, the data reflect a general positive perception of autonomy in oral expression among the surveyed participants. More than half of the students (63, 3%) felt creative in oral tasks, and an important number (66,7%) reported that success was under their control by endorsing item (21) "My success in this class is under my control". In the same vein, the data collected from the reflective forms demonstrated that students enjoyed the freedom to choose their own topics and presentations styles. The autonomy experienced in class increased intrinsic motivation and creativity. Moreover, oral presentation facilitated peer learning and collaboration as mentioned in the subsequent extracts :

S10: "I have learnt group work and how to come in terms of the other members of the group's preferences and opinions I also learnt how to be creative and think outside the box."

S12: "participating in presentations with my classmates has made me discover the advantages of teamwork."

The last aspect of empowerment to be dealt with is learners' perceptions. The results are displayed in table 7 :

Statements of the LEQ	A	%	D	%	U	%
5. My instructor makes me feel inadequate.	2	6,7%	18	60%	10	33,3%

13. I feel intimidated by what is required of me in my class.	8	26.7%	9	30.0%	13	43,3%
8. I am overwhelmed by all the work my class requires.	10	33,3%	10	33,3%	10	33,3%

Table 7: Students' perceptions

While the overall results of the questionna reflect interesting levels of empowerment for most of the surveyed participants, some of the subjects' answers indicate varried perceptions regarding the experiences of contributing to oral presentations and the classroom atmosphere as a whole. Although more than half of the students (60%) disagreed with some of the statements like (5) "My instructor makes me feel inadequate", few (6,7%) of them expressed inadequacy in class. The fact of presenting orally in front of the class was not that appealing for some of the respondents.

They namely referred to restricting the number of the audiance members, incresing levels of interaction, and thinking of other comfortable modes of presenting in class. Such concerns were depicted through the following extracts from the reflective forms :

S5: "If I can change something in the presentation, it will be the number of people in class. I prefer presenting in front the teacher only because I feel comfortable."

S7: "I wish presentations were more interactive."

S12: "I did not like being the center of everyone's focus. I know that it is just in my mind, but I felt that everybody was looking at me. That was too difficult for me."

Accordingly, the teacher's control in class would not be perceived as a sort of authority limiting students' autonomy and creativity.

For statement (13) "I feel intimidated by what is required of me in my class", over a third (43,3%) of the participants were undecided about feelings of untimidation in class. Besides, a third of the subjects (33,3%) reported feeling overwhelmed in class.The students' responses highlight some of the challenges that students might encounter in class suggesting that public performance could be hindering progress for some of the language learners .

5.Pedagogical implications

The overall questionnaire results along with the students' reflective form findings demonstrated that free type oral presentations could significantly foster empowerment among the majority of the EFL undergraduates, yet very few students faced challenges in applying such classroom practice, namely due to the instructor's role ,or the learning environment including peers' impact. On of the basis of the present study results, teachers might find the following recommendations appealing to be undertaken in their respective oral classes, mainly devoted to EFL students :

-Providing varied speaking opportunities: oral presentations of free type can be one of the pedagogical tools that aids learners to build fluency and develop communicative competence in the target language. Teachers might think of the practicality of increasing such practice in their classrooms.

As some of the learners might be intimidated by oral presentations, including mini presentations ,or pair work as a primary step could ease the task for many of the language learners struggling to speak in front of the whole class .

-Fostering autonomy : in the study, it was shown that students who had control of their learning were open to any opportunities that would increase their engagement. Ensuring flexibility in class in terms of topic relevance could increase learner autonomy. As a consequence, students are expected to be more creative in class and express their ideas freely.

-Boosting engagement: the students of the study expressed engagement as an outcome of the classroom setting. This encompasses the choice of tasks and personal involvement. Engagement in oral classes could also be nurtured through instructors' support and peer cooperation.

-Considering the classroom climate : as some of the students were struggling in giving presentations, it is important to assess the impact of oral tasks on the students who are less prepared to participate in class. Teachers might assess the possibility of clarifying performance expectations in advance. Students who need specific guidance or explanations might overcome the difficulties they face when presenting in class.

-Enhancing group dynamics: it is important to create positive group dynamics within the group members who will share and build the same experience. Group

dynamics is widely recognized by teachers who identify that the personality of the class and the classroom atmosphere are essential for successful teaching (Williams & Mercer, 2016). Students who select group members could manage any unexpected hurdles and increase empowerment whenever being on stage in class.

6. CONCLUSION

The study attempted to depict a picture of a learning environment that integrates oral presentations of a free type as a tool to enhance learners' sense of empowerment. That was reflected in the questionnaire's results compiled with the reflective form extracts through the participants' positive perceptions of presentations, meaningfulness, engagement and the impact that practice could have on learners. Although many of the students expressed willingness to give free type presentations and felt empowered in class, few students remained unprepared for that due to lack of support, problems of group dynamics or negative expectations.

For the sake of optimizing learner empowerment, some recommendations were suggested to guide educators who are willing to diversify the sources of engagement and autonomy in their classes .

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