



Students on The Move: A Case Study on How Props Can Improve Students' Presentation Skills

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Abstract

Using props in a presentation is a great way to attract the audience and make it memorable for the participants. They enhance the impact of the presentation and must be chosen carefully. So, this paper aims to introduce the concept of "props" to students and point out its effectiveness during a presentation in Higher Education. The study participants were ten students who had to prepare a presentation for 10 minutes and use props to illustrate it. The method of this study is based on the instrument of observation and the evaluation rubric of students' oral presentations. This study is carried out in three weeks on the subject of "Text Analysis 1" in the first academic year 2022-2023 of the Bachelor's degree study program "English Language" at the Department of Foreign Languages, "Fan S. Noli" University, Korçë, Albania. The study results showed improvements in students' presentation skills. They used words and phrases that were easy to understand, and they involved the audience in the presentations. Seven students used appropriate props to illustrate their presentations, whereas three did not use enough props. Another improvement that was seen is the correct grammar that students used while presenting. Using props gave students comfort and enthusiasm.

Keywords: props, effectiveness, evaluation rubric, presentation skills, Higher Education

1 Introduction

The origin of the word "prop" was recorded in 1400–50; in late Middle English meant "support, support for a vine or plant,"; cognate with Middle Dutch *proppe*, "bottle stopper," early Modern Dutch "support for vines".

Later, the word "props" had another meaning which is "object used in a play," 1898, from *props* (1841), a shortened form of *properties* (which was in theatrical use from early 15c. When you see a play, the players on stage will use props to assist their actions and give the drama more authenticity. Tables, chairs, lamps, and umbrellas are examples of common props used in plays.

Props in a presentation are items that the speaker employs to make an impression on the audience. Only the stage's size influences the prop's size. The majority of props are manageable by the presenter. The times when Steve Jobs launched the most recent iPhone or MacBook are well-known instances. Props can, however, be important, as when Elon Musk introduces the newest Tesla model (Bolívar-Cruz, A., & Verano-Tacoronte, D. 2018).

Presentations in PowerPoint, Keynote and Prezi are also considered as props to be used by students.

So, among the best methods for increasing interest, a sense of humour and diversity in lectures, seminars, and public speaking is the use of powerful visual aids, especially physical "props" that audience members can hold and touch.

Using props in presentations can be a great way for the students to engage the audience and make the message more memorable.

Developing oral presentation competence for students in Higher Education comprises knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are required in order to speak in public, where the goals may include informing, persuading the audience, or self-expressing (Cooper, 2005).

Such competence has not only become the basis of essential skills across disciplines within the academic fields, including Humanities and Social Sciences, but has also turned into a must-have skill for all university graduates (Heron, 2019; Waluyo, 2019).

Oral presentations have been included as one of the essential 21st-century skills in "Fan S. Noli" University, Korca, Albania. The Department of Foreign Languages has provided the course "Text Analysis 1 & 2" and has integrated oral presentations as part of the course activities and learning objectives. The textbook that students of this course use is "*Keynote. Upper intermediate*" by Helen Stephenson, Lewis Lansford and Paul Dummett. It introduces the presentations via TED TALKS videos for each unit. They serve as a perfect example for students to be seen and followed. After two units, they have to prepare a presentation on their own.

However, preparing an oral presentation in front of an audience is challenging (Morreale, 1993) due to psychological factors such as fear, shyness, and motivation. In addition, there are also contextual factors such as the audience's background, topic, etc. One of these factors, or only one, might significantly affect presentation performance and delivery.

2 How “props” help students develop their oral presentation skills

It takes a bit of bravery to fully commit to using props when presenting. A prop can be invaluable as a visual aid to what is being said. Of course, it has to be relevant and well-chosen to add weight to a point. It also needs to be visible to all members of the audience. Usually, with a big audience, large props are necessary so everyone can see, but there are exceptions (Wang, B., Yu, S., & Teo, T. 2018).

Props can help a presentation in several ways:

- *They can make a point concrete.*
- *They can have an emotional impact.*
- *They can be effective metaphors.*
- *They can inject humour into a presentation.*
- *They focus the audience's attention and interest.*
- *They are memorable.*

Props are tools, which can enhance a presentation, not replace the presenter!

They can produce strong and unforgettable analogies because of their physical presence, texture, feel, and sometimes scent.

Here are a few straightforward illustrations that can be used to illustrate various ideas and metaphors.

- The presenter can use the hats and clothing props to illustrate a point, but it is best to hand one out to a training participant or audience member. He or she may use genuine article; typically, novelty items from party shops or children's toy stores that will provide the same, and frequently even better, results.
- Over-sized props (joke-shop inflatables for example) that may be kept with oneself at the front or on stage can be particularly effective, especially for a big audience for whom a small prop might have less impact.
- Smaller props - like fruit and vegetables or chocolate snack bars - are fun to pass around the audience, or throw (with due care), more so if the items have interesting shapes, textures, smells, etc. (Al Jahromi, D. 2020)

A discourse or presentation comes to life and gains a lot of humor when using effective and creative graphic aids. In actuality, the audience will usually be the source of the humor when they notice the prop on you or, even better, when they notice one of their peers wearing, brandishing, or otherwise flaunting an inventive prop.

3 Method

3.1 Research design

The design of this study was quantitative, with a focus on classroom observation. In this research design, the professor's critical observation and evaluation after the students' presentations are crucial (McKernan, 1996). Before presenting the presentations, students choose the topic, read any literature, write the presentation script, and choose the props to be used while presenting. The implementation was realized in the English course “Text Analysis 1” in the Academic Year 2022-2023. The course textbook is *Keynote, Upper Intermediate* by

Helen Stephenson, Lewis Lansford and Paul Dummett, in which students have a section about *Presentation Skills*.

It is carried out over three weeks using the following instruments designed to facilitate the attainment of the research objective:

In the first week, the researcher introduced students to how they had to prepare the presentation on the topic: *Your Goals*.

In the second week, students worked at home to prepare the presentations individually.

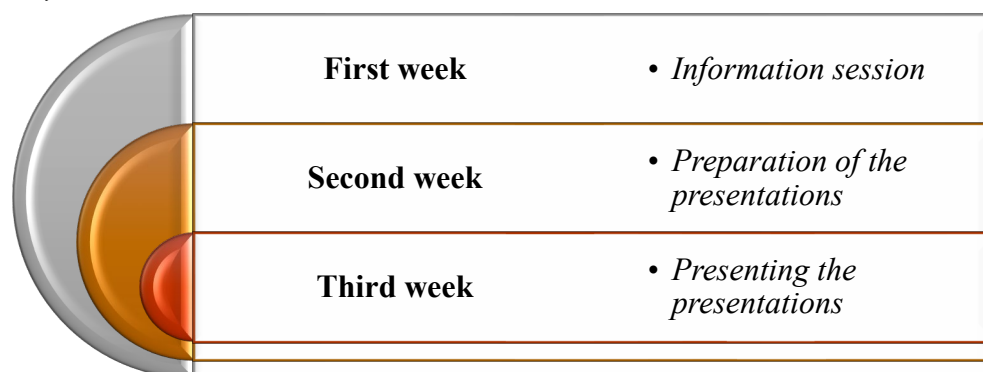
In the third week, they presented them in front of the class. They also showed the props they had chosen to illustrate the memorable event.

At the end of the observation, the researcher evaluated the students' presentations based on the above evaluation rubric.

The graphic design of the study is presented below:

Chart 1. The graphic design of the

study



3.2 The participants of the study

The study's participants are ten students, 7 of them are females, and 3 are males. They range in age from 18 to 21 years old. They are studying in the study program Bachelor's in the English Language. This study program is part of the Department of Foreign Languages at "Fan S. Noli" University in Korça, Albania.

3.3 The instrument of the study

The instrument of the study is *the structured observation*. It is conducted at a specific place, time, where participants are observed in a standardized procedure. Rather than writing a detailed description of all presentations observed, the researcher observed them according to a previously agreed-upon scale written on a rubric:

Table 1: The evaluation rubric of students' oral presentations

The evaluation rubric of students' oral presentations			
Criteria	Excellent	Good	Bad
1. Using words and phrases that are easy to understand	10	7	4
2. Getting your audience involved in the presentation	10	7	4
3. Using props while presenting	10	7	4
4. Following the steps: a. Introduce yourself and the topic. b. Talk about the topic and say what part of life it relates to. c. Give more details and say why it is so important to you. d. Finish the presentation.	10	7	4
5. Using correct Grammar	10	7	4
Total points	50	35	20

Source: (Keynote, Upper Intermediate. Workbook. Eunice Yeates with Sandy Millin, Mike Harrison, Rhiannon Ball, Fran Watkins. National Geographic Learning. United Kingdom. 2022. Pg. 32-33)

4 Findings of the study

The participants of this study were introduced for the first time the way to use pops in their oral presentations.

As mentioned above the study was carried out during a three-week period.

In the first week, an information session was organized by presenting to students some tips on how to use props: (Wilson, A. 2012)

- *Choose props that are relevant to the message.* Students have to make sure that the props are directly related to the point they are trying to give. This will help the audience understand the connection between the message and the prop.
- *Keep it simple.* They should not use too many props or one that are too complicated. This can distract from the message and make it harder for the audience to understand.
- *Use props to illustrate a point.* They can be a great way to visually demonstrate a concept or idea. For example, if a student is giving a presentation on renewable energy, he/she could use a picture of a solar panel to show how it works.
- *Practice using props.* Students should make sure they are comfortable with the props and how to use them effectively. This will help them avoid fumbling around during the presentation and keep the audience engaged.
- *Use props sparingly.* Students should not rely too heavily on pros. They should enhance the message, not be focused of your presentation.
- *Consider the size of the audience.* If students are presenting to a large group, they should make sure that the props are large enough for everyone to see. If they are presenting to a smaller group, they can use smaller props.
- *Verify that the prop functions.* The likelihood that something will go wrong increases with the complexity of the prop. It should be thoroughly tested before use. This is especially crucial if the prop is a focal point of the presentation, such as if you are showing the public an invention.
- *Have a backup plan in case the prop fails.* Simple objects with few or no moving parts provide many props. There is virtually little risk that they will not function. What about elaborate props like the robotic bird mentioned earlier? What if you lose

or forget your straightforward prop? Can you change it? Do you have a standby strategy?

- *Keep the prop hidden until you need it*, if at all reasonable. Small props that you can put in your pocket or under the lectern make this easier to accomplish. If you have a large stage with wings or a back curtain, it would be able to use larger props. The prop should be kept hidden for two reasons: first, it won't draw attention away from what you are saying, and second, its impact will be stronger if it is only seen when you expose it.
- *Make innovative use of your props*. Use your imagination and try to come up with unique props that would have an actual influence on your audience using the thousands of options available. Put the prop away when you are finished with it. Once you are through utilizing a prop, it is advised to put it away (or at least to the side) unless you may need to refer to it again. Otherwise, the prop might serve as a diversion during the remainder of your speech.

The majority of students realized that adding props to presentations could be a fantastic strategy to increase the message's impact and memorability. The correct props must be chosen, used sparingly, and practiced beforehand by the students.

In the second week, students worked on their own to write the presentations. The preparation stage went through the following steps:

1. *Determine your objective*: Students understood the purpose of their presentations and the key message they wanted to convey. They identified the main points or ideas that they wanted to highlight using the props.

2. *Select relevant props*: They chose props that were directly related to the topic: ***Your Goals***.

3. *Plan your presentation structure*: Students outlined the structure of their presentation, including an introduction, main points, and conclusion. They determined where and how they would incorporate the props to support each section.

4. *Introduce the props*: They had to start their presentation by introducing the audience to the props they would be using. They would explain props' significance and how they related to the topic.

5. *Use props strategically*: They decided where to incorporate the props to enhance the message. This could involve demonstrating a process, showing a visual representation, or using props to engage the audience's senses. They had to be mindful of the timing and placement of each prop to maximize its impact.

6. *Provide context and explanations*: As students would use each prop, they had to provide context and explanations to help the audience understand its relevance.

7. *Practice and rehearse*: Students had to practice the presentation with the props to ensure smooth transitions and effective utilization. They had to familiarize themselves with handling the props comfortably and confidently.

8. *Recap and reinforce*: Towards the end of the presentation, students would recap the main points and reinforce the message using the props (González-Betancor, S. M., Bolívar-Cruz, A., & Verano-Tacoronte, D. 2019).

The props should complement the presentation and enhance understanding, rather than distract or overwhelm the audience. That is why students had to keep them simple, relevant, and aligned with the overall message.

In the third week, students presented their presentations during two classes of 60 minutes. The results of their presentations are as follow:

- All the 10 students presented the oral presentations. The aim was to describe their goals about the future.
- At the end of each presentation, the researcher evaluated the students according to the evaluation rubric.
- In reference to the first criterion “*Using words and phrases that are easy to understand*”, all the students used words and phrases that were easy to understand.
- According to the other criterion “*Getting your audience involved in the presentation*”, 100% of the students got the audience involved in the presentation. All the class was curious to hear about each others' goals.
- If we refer to the other criterion “*Using props while presenting*”, 7 students used appropriate props whereas 3 students did not use enough props to illustrate their presentations. Students caused humour when they introduced props to the audience.

The props that students used were as follow:

1. books, maps, a small statue, 10 stickers
2. books, painting brushes, toy cars, driving license, a packet of crisps, a resistance band
3. a ladybug, money, books, a highlighter, a bar of chocolate, an apple, iPods, a board game, perfume.
4. a toy car, his first toy car
5. stickers, books with poems, dictionary, short novels, a photo of her child
6. a wallet, a passport, a map, a bag, a perfume, money, paper, phone,
7. food for animals, a souvenir, a tape, cloth
8. books, a map, painting, brushes
9. pens, books, maps, games
10. chocolate, perfume, books, toy cars

The other criterion referred to “*Following the steps of a presentation*”. In general all the students introduced themselves and the topic. They talked about the topic and said what part of life it related to. 7 students gave more details and said why it was so important to them. The presentations of three students were too short.

All students finished their presentations by using the appropriate phrases: *Thanks for listening for... Do you have any questions?*

The last criterion was about “*Using correct Grammar*”. All students used the appropriate grammar to present their presentations. They did not make any major mistakes so as to cause misunderstandings.

5 Discussion

From the results above, it is seen that students effectively implemented props in their presentations. Referring to the TED TALKS videos, they saw an example of such a presentation, which was a key point for them. During the information session, students learned more about how to use props and when. Later, they worked on preparing the presentations and finding the appropriate props. In the end, students presented the oral presentations in front of the class.

From the students' presentations, the researcher observed that using props gave them comfort and enthusiasm. They also brought humor into the class as many props were little or just toys. Students enjoyed this experience a lot.

At the same time, students created a sense of intrigue and curiosity in the class. The audience was active and involved in the presentations. Students were illustrating only the key concepts they had to demonstrate with props. The message of the presentations was conveyed concerning their goals for the future.

Presenting in front of an audience for students may be intimidating, especially for less confident students. But props helped them alleviate some nervousness by providing a sense of security.

Another aspect that was shown is the students' creativity. This kind of oral presentation showed students a sense of personal expression. They used props to add a unique touch and demonstrate their individuality. Choosing the appropriate props reflected their personal preferences about students' future plans.

In addition, students improved their presentation skills by fulfilling the evaluation rubric criteria, incorporating props effectively, and leaving a lasting impression on the audience.

6 Conclusion

This paper aimed to introduce the concept of "props" to students and point out its relevance during a presentation in Higher Education. The study participants were ten students from the Bachelor in "English Language" program at the Department of Foreign Languages, "Fan S. Noli" University, Korçë, Albania.

They had to prepare a presentation for 10 minutes and use props to illustrate it. The method of this study was based on the instrument of observation and the evaluation rubric of students' oral presentations. This study was carried out in three weeks on the subject of "Text Analysis 1" in the first academic year 2022-2023.

Their presentations aimed to describe their goals for the future and to use props while presenting. In the first week, students learned how presentations were written through an information session. In the second week, students worked alone to prepare the presentations. In the third week, students presented their presentations.

They discovered that utilizing props can be more multi-sensory than only hearing or reading written words on a screen. (Cooper, 2005) Props, or other visual aids, have a tangible presence, texture, feel, and maybe smell that can help to build solid and unforgettable metaphors. Additionally, they used PowerPoint presentations, which were exposed to the classroom projector. Students gained more self-assurance, presentation skills, and an understanding of the importance of their talks. They understood that including great and creative visual aids would also add fun and vitality to a presentation. (Al Jahromi, D. 2020)

The props that students used in the class varied: books, painting brushes, toy cars, driving license, a packet of crisps, a resistance band, a ladybug, money, a highlighter, a bar of chocolate, an apple, iPods, a board game, a perfume, a wallet, a passport, a map, a bag, a perfume, money, paper, phone, food for animals, a souvenir, a tape, cloth, chocolate, chocolate, and toy cars.

It takes patience and effort to develop skills in speaking in public, but with practice and dedication, students can become assured and compelling speakers. Remembering to

thoroughly organize the presentation, engage the audience, use visual aids, talk clearly and confidently, ask for comments, and pick up from others are all important.

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