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Engineering Technical Oral Presentation: Voices of the Stakeholder

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Abstract

In Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, engineering students are expected to deliver technical oral presentations on numerous occasions prior to graduation. These presentations include survey report presentations, laboratory report presentations, project/assignment presentations as well as final year project presentations. Technical presentation refers to a prepared formal presentation on scientific, engineering, technological, business types, regulatory, legal, managerial or social scientific information topics to the non-expert audience (DiSanza and Legge, 2003). Students often struggled when they have to deliver technical oral presentations and most of the time they had difficulty to deliver effective presentations especially for their final year project. This study was conducted to address these issues with the intention of proposing measures to help students deliver effective technical oral presentation. This paper reports on the preliminary findings on; 1) the specific areas of difficulties faced by the students in delivering effective technical oral presentation and, 2) the different ways on improving ineffective technical oral presentation. A set of questionnaire was distributed to 235 students from six different engineering faculties in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Findings indicated that the students encountered problems when delivering technical oral presentations especially in terms of content, delivery and language. They also provided suggestions on how to improve their technical oral presentation skills. It is hoped that the findings can shed some lights where the teaching of technical oral presentation skills to the engineering students is concerned.

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Keywords: Engineering; technical, skill; report; oral presentation

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1. Introduction

Technical oral presentation is compulsory in most engineering classes in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. These presentations can be survey report presentations, laboratory report presentations, project/assignment presentations as well as final year project presentations. Therefore, it can be assumed that delivering technical oral presentations is one of the important skill or requirements that every engineering student needs to go through prior to graduation. However, it was observed that delivering technical oral presentation is not an easy task. Noor Raha and Kaur (2011) stated that technical oral presentations are an integral component of engineering courses, but it is no doubt an anxiety-inducing experience for most engineering students. This shows that students find delivering technical oral presentations can be a daunting task and one that must be completed successfully.

In addition to the above, King (2002) indicated that when oral presentations are assigned in class, the teacher will get either complete silence or grouses from students who find the idea of oral presentations frustrating and intimidating. This is because, according to her, students are overwhelmed by the research and communication skills that are necessary for a successful presentation. They feel apprehensive not only about their presentation skills but also the content of the presentations. And to make it worst, some diligent and hardworking students who had invested time and effort on their oral presentation did not always get the intended outcomes (King, 2002). Hence, it is clear that students need to master both the content as well as the skill of oral presentation in order to deliver effective presentation.

Mastery of technical oral presentation is vital not only for academic performance but also to secure employment after graduation. Bhattacharyya and Sargunan (2009) commented that engineers of the 21st century need to possess an adequate knowledge of effective communicative competence in “presentation skills” and other “attributes” required in technical oral presentation. Salbiah and Dubois (2002) suggested that the ability to deliver successful oral presentations is a practical necessity in the engineering profession. This view is supported by Hairuzila et al (2011) who claimed that employers are now emphasizing that success as an engineer requires more than simply strong technical capabilities; communication is among the skills that are also crucial. Therefore, it is felt that more studies need to be conducted to investigate the students’ perceptions and views on delivering oral presentation especially technical oral presentations. With this aim in mind, this study attempts to find answers to the following questions.

1. What are the specific areas of difficulties faced by students in delivering effective technical oral presentation?
2. What are the different ways on improving ineffective technical oral presentation?

2. Research Methodology

The study was conducted at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Bahru Campus. As illustrated in Table 1 below, respondents were students from five different engineering faculties namely, the Faculty of Civil Engineering, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Faculty of Biosciences and Bioengineering and Faculty of Chemical Engineering.

Table 1: Participants of the study

Faculty	Frequency	Percentage
Civil Engineering	28	11.9
Mechanical Engineering	35	14.9
Electrical Engineering	90	38.3
Biosciences and Bioengineering	30	12.8
Chemical Engineering	52	22.1
Total	235	100

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