

An Analysis of Oral Presentation at the Universities of Technology in South Africa: Communication Skills for Audit Qualifications

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to analyse oral presentation at the Universities of Technology (UoTs) in South Africa. The paper does so by analysing the impact of oral presentation through the role of facilitation and teaching of oral presentation; and the assessment of oral presentation. On one hand, the study is significant given that education is a vital pillar of sustainable development; hence, the study identifies the problem that oral presentation is not underscored in the auditing curriculum to empower the students with communication skills and confidence in public speaking of subject content. On the other hand, there still no evidence of how oral presentations are facilitated and assessed from the subject outline in communication skills. Adopting a content analysis as a research methodology and review of related literature, is apparent that the study focuses on the description of concepts that explains the oral presentations and rubrics. Findings from the analysis of literature shows lack of practical demonstration of oral presentation and lack of transparency in the assessment of oral presentation. In conclusion, the study recommends the implications of oral presentations as imperative for lifelong learning, time management, public speaking, self-confidence and critical thinking.

Keywords: Assessment, Critical thinking, Facilitation, Feedback, Oral presentation, Rubrics

1. Introduction and Background

Oral presentation is said to be a central part of human communication skills. Since, the present paper is driven by a desire to analyse the impact of oral presentation in higher education sector, Al-Nouh *et al.* (2015) explain that oral presentation provides a considerable skill important for students in the higher education and to increase their level of confidence in their future careers (De Grez *et al.*, 2012). According to Joughin (2010) oral presentation skill is the most important form of formative assessment and it requires proficiencies for learning (Carless & Boud, 2018). It is an assessment tool used to build students confidence and communication skills (De Grez *et al.*, 2012; Haber & Lingard, 2001). Joughin (2010) further explains oral presentation as any assessment of learning which is conducted through the spoken words. As these spoken words are presented, then students become more active in their learning. Accordingly, it is through oral presentation that students become effective in their learning (Joughin, 2010). Yet, without oral presentation, students cannot gauge their communication skills. For example, Biggs (2003) added that verbal communication can assist students to develop a *higher-order thinking* and become independent learners.

Therefore, this may be attributed to the fact that, when students are taught properly, they will be able to construct their own meanings through oral communication.

Given the variety of challenges of presentation skills among auditors, oral presentation is not being taught properly to empower the auditing students at the UoTs. Hence, the study analyses the impact of oral presentation through teaching and assessment. Since 2013, the researcher worked together with the auditing students on presentation, aimed to boost their confidence and to improving their communication skills. The researcher observed their curricula in communication skills and realised that there is a gap in the curriculum as the curriculum is not empowering students and graduates to achieve better outcomes in oral communication deliverables, such as speeches, PowerPoint presentations, and poster presentations.

Oral presentation skills are central to auditor's communication; however, little is known about how these skills are taught and assessed. As auditors need excellent presentation skills and interpersonal skills to effectively interact with their clients, auditors do not learn presentation skills through curricula,

instead they learn through their involvement in the working environment and career lives. Therefore, the position of this paper is to advocate auditing students to learn communication skills during their study phases. This will assist students with learning innovations (Duffy & Jonassen, 2013).

According to Crawford *et al.* (2011) professionals in the field of accounting need necessary skills to become competent accountants and auditors. Knechel (2000) believes that such skills can be facilitated to empower professionals with analytical skills. Tenedero *et al.* (2018) add that there is a need for alignment of academic and professional skills. As a result, auditors need to use same analytical skills to examine and interpret information for audit purposes.

As oral presentations evolve in formative assessment, it is important to consider rubrics for assessment of oral presentation. Wolf and Stevens (2007) describe rubrics as an assessment tool that clearly indicates achievement criteria across all areas of assessment relating to student work. It can be an excellent tool to use when assessing students' work (Carless, 2014). Its purposes are to help define the expected performance; sets standards of quality; show levels of accomplishment; helpful in diagnostic assessment; and provide feedback to students (Wolf & Stevens, 2007). However, the use of rubrics in assessment of students is not without problems (Bhati, 2012). Some of these problems include the rubrics not being shared with students before an assignment is due – this will create a problem and the students may not know what is expected for the dimensions of their work. Using rubrics in oral assessment will enhance teaching and learning and improve students' skills in oral communication and problem-solving skills. Carless (2014) states that oral presentation requires rubrics grading to address the task, understanding, arguments and the structure. Rubrics can be used for feedback and assessment (Carless, 2014). De Grez *et al.* (2012) explain that both feedback and assessment play an important role in teaching and learning of oral presentation skills.

In this study, the following research questions will be answered: how is oral presentation facilitated and taught; and how is oral presentation assessed? The limitation of the study is the analysis of oral presentation at the Universities of Technology in South Africa. The study is organized into: problem

statement, justification of the study, a review from existing literature, analysis and discussion. Lastly, the study ends with a conclusion and recommendations.

2. Problem Statement

The problem that triggered this research was based on an observation in a natural setting. Barrable (2020) states that identifying a problem from natural settings is based on a direct observation. Artz and Armour-Thomas (1992) recognise that in a natural setting, an observation increases both cognitive and metacognitive behaviours to assist students' participation in problem solving. Hence, an oral presentation is not underscored in the auditing curriculum to empower the students with communication skills and the visible gap is the low levels of confidence among students as they struggle in the area of oral communication. The current curriculum on communication skills do not prepare university students to become confident in public speaking and perhaps adequately prepared to deliver presentations to board committees in the workplace environments. Thus, the current curriculum in all universities of technology business communication has failed to cover an oral presentation to prepare the students with opportunity to project a PowerPoint and stand to give their presentations. For the reason that students are often anxious to express themselves before their peers, the current study sought to encourage oral presentation to prepare students confidence and future world of work. One of the main challenges students face in making oral presentation comes to play when assuming that their message is understood by the audience. Oral presentations are frequently used for both formative and summative assessments. However, it is common to use it in a formative capacity to ensure that feedback is given to students immediately for improvement purposes. It is common that auditors should possess exceptional communication skills in order to communicate well with their clients and management. Auditors require oral skills to present their audit findings to audit committees and management. Communicating audit results are always important when presented orally. Thus, the auditing standard requires the auditors to communicate with the audit committee regarding certain matters related to the conduct of an audit and to findings and recommendations. This study will address the problem of low confidence level of communication of auditing students at the higher institutions.

3. Justification of the Study

Literature has shown that oral presentation is a skill that can be learned. Chandren and Yaacob (2016) found that oral presentation skill is an indispensable soft skill that contributes to prepare the accounting graduates to the field of work. The present study aimed to analyse oral presentation at the Universities of Technology in South Africa. The paper does so by analysing the impact of oral presentation through the role of facilitation and teaching of oral presentation; and the assessment of oral presentation. Hence, this study builds on and contributes to work in the field of Chandren and Yaacob (2016) on accounting students' oral presentation skills and Arquero et al. (2007) on accounting students and communication. Although a number of studies have examined communication skills among audit students (Siriwardane & Durden, 2014; Daff 2013), there has not been a strong focus on analysis of oral presentation for assessment practices at the institution of higher learning among auditing students. As such, this study provides additional insights about the needs for oral presentation skills for auditing students. This research differs from previous studies in that it focuses on the analysis of oral presentation for assessment practices at the institution of higher learning by identifying the needs for oral communication to auditing students. In doing this, it draws strongly on the work of Mackey (1990) who investigated auditing course format on communication skills and found that communication skills such as oral presentation gives the students' knowledge of auditing reflect how communication would be in the real world. Therefore, for students to communicate effectively with logic, the oral presentation has to be taught and assessed.

4. Literature Review

The following section of the literature presents the *oral presentation* and assessment of oral presentation through *rubrics*.

4.1 Oral Presentation

Oral presentation is described in the literature as a practical (Mitchell & Bakewell, 1995), professional skill (Magin & Helmore, 2001), and presentation skill (Haber & Lingard, 2001). Alwi and Sidhu (2013) explain oral presentations as important for personal growth in tertiary coaching the business students. Kaur and Ali (2017) also remark that oral presentation is important to develop the skills and

confidence of students. For example, Chandren and Yaacob (2016) conducted an action research on accounting student's oral presentation skill looking at the soft skills prominent for their career opportunities in the field of accounting. Their study found that presentation skill is important in getting graduates ready for logical reasoning and critical thinking. Oral presentations can provide rewarding opportunities (Sinclair, 2014). It increases public speaking and to practice aspects of oral communication (Sleigh, 2013). Thus, students who participate in oral presentation are likely to acquire cognitive and practical skills that will enable them to function productively in the working environment.

Oral presentations involve a sophisticated cognitive process. Through oral presentation, students gain a potential enrichment through feedback and confidence. Notwithstanding the fact that lecturers also get the opportunity to assess the course content and the students' capacity on cognitive skills. At the Tshwane University of Technology, the oral presentations are formatted as small-group presentations and are done face-to-face behind closed doors in front of peers. The most common practice and format involves five students presenting during lecture time. Because of logistics and the high number of students enrolled for the Auditing at the B Tech level, oral presentations tend to be quite short within 10 minutes for presentation, questions and answering session. Up until now, the oral presentations are used only in a formative assessment. Hence, the latter dimension is aimed at helping students to build up their year-marks.

4.2 Rubrics

Brookhart and Chen (2015) studied the quality and effectiveness of descriptive rubrics and their study found that rubrics offers quality evidence that learning has taken place based on the focused criteria. Meanwhile, Brookhart (2018) states that for rubrics to be effective, there must be criteria appropriate to an assessment. Hence, an effective rubric must possess a specific list of criteria to assist students to know exactly what is expected of the assessment (Jones et al., 2017). On one hand drawing on the context of example, the effective rubrics should provide key evaluative criteria with a range for each criterion and the weightings for each criterion (King et al., 2013). On the other hand, Allen and Tanner (2006) argue that rubrics can be powerful tools for teaching, learning and assessment, if they are well

used. A rubric is a learning and assessment tool that articulates the expectations for assignments. According to Andrade (2005), the use of rubrics could improve teaching and learning, if the teachers are able to compare the standards with student performance. However, Andrade (2005) warns against the methods that limit the effectiveness of rubrics. These limitations include risk turning the role of the teacher into that of grader; bias towards assessment and giving value to student work that do not precisely signify student learning competencies (Lim, 2013; Li & Lindsey, 2015; Bargainnier, 2003).

With the thriving recognition that oral assessment is one of the methods to test students' verbal communication skills. Oral presentation has not emerged as a priority in most institutions of higher learning nowadays (Murillo-Zamorano & Montanero, 2018). Various methods of assessments are employed over the oral presentation, despite its intention to prepare the students' ability to communication skills (Magin & Helmore, 2001) and confidence for future career prospects (Campbell et al., 2001). With the noticeable intentions of helping students to build their confidence in communication and public speaking, oral presentation remains amongst some of the least methods of assessments. Likewise, oral presentation is almost utterly underused and even not encouraged for formal assessment. These facts are compounded by the difficulties of not having the rubrics as an authoritative rule for specific criteria in grading the oral presentations for students (Wolf & Stevens, 2007; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). Throughout the assessment purposes, assessors should know that oral presentations are becoming increasingly common at universities. Hence, there are various reasons for the existence of oral presentations as to test cognitive skills; allow students to demonstrate their ability to raise and synthesis ideas, build analytical skills and to share and

engage with their peers constructively. According to Wolf and Stevens (2007) assessment rubrics can be a particularly useful tool in assessing student presentations. Kerby and Romine (2009) state that students can improve their oral presentation skills when they know the expectations for effective presentations.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Content Analysis

Since the study is not an empirical, the study followed the review of literature on the facilitation and assessment of oral presentation, including the analysis of the curricula for auditing communication to answer the questions about the role of oral presentations in auditing and in communication skills curricula at UoTs. Therefore, the research methodology employed in this paper includes content analysis, by looking at the UoTs accountancy curriculum and course outlines and further review of recent literature on the topic. Content analysis is most suitable for qualitative method (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) and further strengthen the meanings and interpretation (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) through phrases and content (Downe-Wamboldt 1992; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Therefore, the adopted research methodology fits the objective of the paper, which is to analyse oral presentation at the Universities of Technology in South Africa – mainly with regard to explanation of literature review and concepts. Table 1 presents the UoTs, which all presents communication skills for auditing students.

In South Africa, the total higher education system consists of 26 universities, which are classified as general academic universities, comprehensive universities and the six universities of technology. These universities of technologies include, Cape Peninsula

Table 1: Universities of Technology in South Africa

Name	Cluster
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	Social Services
Central University of Technology	Social Services
Durban University of Technology	Social Services
Mangosuthu University of Technology	Social Services
Tshwane University of Technology	Social Services
Vaal University of Technology	Social Services

Source: <https://nationalgovernment.co.za/units/type/12/university-of-technology>

University of Technology; Central University of Technology; Durban University of Technology; Mangosuthu University of Technology; Tshwane University of Technology; and Vaal University of Technology. All the universities of technology (UoTs) are committed to the constitutional mandate of providing educational opportunities for all citizens and social services to students.

5.2 Analysis and Discussion

Since 2013 the researcher made a dedicated effort to go beyond the course outline for the degree requirements of B Tech qualification, researcher noticed that the UoT's have a technical writing course to improve students' communication skills. However, the facilitation, teaching and assessment of oral presentation was not outlined. Since the paper reviewed the literature, the impact of oral presentation has not been empirically tested through facilitation and assessment across the Universities of Technology. As a result, the content analysed was collected from the available prospectus across the UoT's, with Table 2 outlining curricula in communication course designed for B Tech Auditing students.

The Table shows that university curriculum on communication should foster skills that develop students' capacity to become cohesive in the working environment and for lifelong learning. This means acquiring professional curriculum competencies will enable students to adequately face the challenges of their professional activity.

Analysis of Table 2 reveals that there are gaps in the curriculum, which further interest my commitment to helping the students with practical facilitation of oral presentation. Thus, on one hand, this paper tries to close the curriculum gaps by embracing the value of oral presentation through pedagogy that are offered by practice. On the other hand, there is consensus in the research literature that oral presentation should be facilitated and assessed from the learning point of view (Carless, 2014), with notable researchers even arguing that oral presentation is the most powerful tool to build student confidence (Joughin, 2010; De Grez et al., 2012; Haber & Lingard, 2001). The literature further refers to the themes that are identifiable as facilitation of oral presentation and assessment of oral presentation. These themes are discussed in *sections 4.1 and 4.2 above*. All in all, most of the studies in the

Table 2: Curricula in Communication Skills and Content per UoTs

CPUT	TUT	CUT	DUT	MUT	VUT
Module Name					
Advanced Management Communication Skills	Advanced Management Communication Skills	Advanced Management Communication Skills	Advanced Management Communication Skills	Advanced Management Communication Skills	Advanced Management Communication Skills
Course Content					
Identifying the elements of advanced business communication, advanced communication in organisations, advanced business procedures, intercultural communication and diversity management, advanced verbal presentation skills including chairing meetings.	Elements of advanced business communication in an organisation, advanced business procedures, intercultural communication and diversity management. This subject also includes presentation skills , including chairing a meeting.	Elements of advanced business communication in an organisation, advanced business procedures, intercultural communication and diversity management. This subject also includes presentation skills , including chairing a meeting.	Learners to identify key competencies of advanced business communication and advanced business procedures. And to apply key competencies of advanced business communication namely: persuasion negotiation and conflict management; intercultural communication and diversity management in work-related scenarios.	Effectively apply communication principles to a variety of communication activities, contexts and resolving problems. Demonstrate verbal and written communication skills.	Elements of advanced business communication in an organisation, advanced business procedures, intercultural communication and diversity management.
Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No

Source: Author

literature conducted show that oral presentations are important to students because it helps them to gain confidence in subject content and to improve the communication skills and analytical skills. While, Carless and Boud (2018) signify that it is for development of students. Therefore, rubrics are required for grading the task, understanding, arguments and for feedback and assessment (Carless, 2014).

Another *sub-theme emerged* from the discussion of the literature is the skills expected of the auditors to be incorporated and integrated into the curriculum.

5.2.1 Communication Skills for Auditors

Communication skills in audit underpins audit success. Thus, auditors need to have interpersonal skills; non-verbal communication; listening skills; techniques for building rapport; methods for dealing with difficult interactions; and effective briefing techniques. This is particularly important that any successful auditor should be an effective communicator to clearly convey thoughts, ideas, and suggestions during meetings, presentations, interviews, and negotiations with audit clients and executive management.

It is through facilitation of presentations, group discussions, practical exercises and feedback that the auditing students will learn and see themselves as others see them in terms of the style and the impressions they create in oral presentation. Therefore, all these skills will increase students' ability to meet the ideal curricula requirement to can deal with audit situations.

To further understand students' proficiencies in presentation, the study advocates for clear alignment of course objectives. For example, communication curricular for auditors should include: best practices in communication to strengthen business results; ways in which communication can occur; communication style; processes to respond to the communication styles of others; tools and best practices to communicate clearly; ways to manage the fear of public speaking; professionalism; stages of the interview process to obtain needed information; strategies to negotiate; and strategies to strengthening client relationships.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Having to analyse oral presentation at the Universities of Technology in South Africa, the paper concludes that students learn oral presentation

by trial and error as compared to facilitation and teaching. Hence, the literature review reveals that oral presentations are widely covered in the content curriculum across auditing qualifications. However, the facilitation and teaching is not done. Hence, the paper recommends that students should do at least one oral presentation each semester. This may enhance students' development of effective communication skills and their ability to learn from intended professional values. The paper also recommends that if oral presentation is contextualized in teaching and assessment, the students will improve their communication skills. Furthermore, their acquisition of skills will further help them to recognize social nature of the language they are learning. As a result, lecturers need to be aware of the language students use, and to encourage them to communicate the proper context.

On the other hand, this paper suggests that lecturers should not make an assumption that students are well equipped with presentation skills. Thus, it should not be taken for granted that students have been provided with tools required do well with oral communication. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the lecturer to teach students how to deliver a solid presentation – this could make the difference in the quality of their presentations and in equipping them for success.

Given the acclaimed importance of oral presentation as a vital pillar of building a confidence, identification of unclear description of courses contents at the universities of technologies communication course is a cause for concern. The paper finds that oral presentation is one of the most important transversal competences for the professional career of auditors. Oral presentation skills should be the key competencies for the future professional development of auditing students. Therefore, the paper recommends that the use of rubric should promote students' learning by providing them with a clear orientation to improve their performance on current academic assignments and in future professional situations. This paper opens up opportunities for future research in the areas of oral presentation in higher education for auditing students.

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