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Exploring EFL Students' Experiences of Reading-Based Oral Presentations; From Text to Talk

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores EFL students' experiences of reading-based oral presentations in a university speaking course. While integrated-skills instruction is widely recommended, limited research has examined how learners perceive the process of transforming written texts into oral presentations. Using a descriptive-interpretive approach, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and students' reflective responses. The data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns in learners' experiences.

The findings reveal four main themes: reading as cognitive support for speaking, increased confidence through content familiarity, gradual negotiation of speaking anxiety, and ownership in meaning construction. The results suggest that reading-based oral presentations function as a scaffolded bridge between comprehension and production, enabling students to organize ideas and articulate interpretations more confidently. Beyond performance outcomes, the activity fostered meaningful engagement and interpretive speaking practices.

This study contributes to integrated-skills pedagogy by highlighting learners' lived experiences in EFL contexts and offers pedagogical insights for designing supportive speaking activities grounded in reading tasks.

Keywords: EFL Speaking, Integrated Skills, Oral Presentation, Qualitative Research, Learner Experience

INTRODUCTION

Language encompasses a range of essential skills, including speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Among these, speaking is often regarded as a significant challenge, particularly for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Speaking requires not only a mastery of integrated skills but also a considerable amount of self-confidence and courage. It is important to note that simply possessing knowledge of grammatical structures or an impressive vocabulary does not automatically qualify an individual as an eloquent speaker of English. In the context of an EFL classroom, encouraging students to speak in front of their peers can be quite daunting, both for the instructor and the students themselves.

Speaking is undeniably a crucial skill in the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, as it enables students to articulate their ideas, opinions, and interpretations verbally. However, numerous EFL learners encounter significant difficulties when it comes to speaking, especially when they find themselves lacking in ideas, confidence, or sufficient linguistic resources. These challenges often lead to a reluctance among students to engage in oral communication activities within the classroom setting. This reluctance not only hampers their learning experience but also limits their opportunities to practice and improve their speaking abilities.

In EFL contexts, speaking instruction is frequently conducted through isolated speaking tasks that require spontaneous oral production. Such tasks may not sufficiently support learners in developing ideas or organizing content for oral expression. Reading activities, in contrast, provide learners with access to language input, content knowledge, and discourse models that can support speaking development. When reading is meaningfully connected to speaking activities, learners may be better equipped to articulate ideas orally.

One instructional practice that integrates reading and speaking is the use of reading-based oral presentations. In this activity, students read texts such as books, newspapers, or articles and then present their understanding orally. This process encourages learners to interpret texts, select relevant information, and express meanings through spoken language. From a qualitative perspective, such activities may influence how students experience speaking tasks, construct meaning, and perceive their own speaking abilities.

Although previous studies have examined oral presentations and reading activities in EFL classrooms, many have focused primarily on outcomes or performance measures. There remains limited qualitative research exploring how students experience reading-based oral presentations and how these activities support their meaning-making processes in speaking. Therefore, this study aims to explore EFL students' experiences of reading-based oral presentations in classroom settings.

Existing studies on oral presentations and reading instruction in EFL contexts have largely adopted quantitative approaches, focusing on students' speaking scores or achievement gains. However, fewer studies have explored students' lived experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes when engaging in reading-based oral presentation activities. In particular, there is limited qualitative research examining how reading-based oral presentations shape students' confidence, engagement, and ability to transform written texts into spoken discourse. This study seeks to address this gap by providing an in-depth qualitative exploration of EFL students' experiences with reading-based oral presentations.

Review of Related Literature

Speaking in EFL Learning as a Meaning-Making Process

Speaking is a complex and dynamic language skill that involves not only linguistic competence but also cognitive, social, and affective dimensions (Bygate, 1987; Brown, 2004). This multifaceted nature of speaking encompasses various elements, such as the ability to articulate thoughts clearly, engage with others effectively, and respond appropriately in diverse social situations. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, speaking is often perceived by learners as one of the most challenging skills to master. This perception arises due to several factors, including limited exposure to authentic language use, which can hinder the development of fluency and spontaneity. Additionally,

many learners experience anxiety and a lack of confidence when speaking, which can further exacerbate their difficulties (Thornbury, 2005).

From a qualitative perspective, speaking is not merely a measurable outcome but a dynamic process through which learners actively construct and negotiate meaning in interactional contexts. This means that speaking involves more than just the production of words; it requires learners to engage in a continuous exchange of ideas, adapting their language and strategies based on the responses of their interlocutors. Previous research has shown that EFL learners' speaking difficulties are often related to limited ideas, insufficient vocabulary, and uncertainty about how to organize thoughts orally (Richards, 2008). For instance, a student may struggle to express a complex opinion due to a lack of appropriate vocabulary or may find it challenging to structure their thoughts coherently in real-time conversations. These challenges significantly influence how students experience speaking tasks and shape their participation in classroom activities.

Understanding learners' experiences of speaking activities is therefore essential for designing pedagogical practices that support meaningful oral communication. By recognizing the specific obstacles that learners face, educators can implement targeted strategies to enhance students' speaking skills. This could include creating low-anxiety environments, providing ample opportunities for practice, and integrating interactive activities that encourage collaboration and peer feedback. Ultimately, fostering a supportive atmosphere can empower learners to overcome their fears and engage more fully in the process of speaking, leading to greater confidence and competence in their language abilities.

Reading as a Resource for Meaning Construction in Speaking

Reading plays a significant role in language learning by providing learners with access to linguistic input, discourse structures, and content knowledge (Grabe, 2009). From an input-based perspective, exposure to written texts allows learners to develop vocabulary and syntactic awareness, which can support productive language use (Krashen, 1985; Nation, 2001). However, qualitative studies emphasize that reading also functions as a cognitive and interpretative activity through which learners actively construct meaning.

Reader-Response Theory views reading as a transactional process between the reader and the text, in which meaning is constructed based on readers' experiences, background knowledge, and interpretations (Rosenblatt, 1994). When learners engage deeply with texts, they do not merely decode language but interpret ideas and perspectives. This interpretative process becomes particularly relevant when reading activities are followed by speaking tasks, as learners are required to articulate their understanding orally.

Several studies suggest that reading can support speaking by providing learners with ideas, vocabulary, and organizational frameworks, thereby reducing anxiety associated with spontaneous speech (Nation & Newton, 2009). From a qualitative standpoint, examining how learners perceive and utilize reading as preparation for speaking can provide insights into the role of reading in supporting oral meaning-making.

Oral Presentation as a Pedagogical and Experiential Activity

Oral presentation is a commonly used pedagogical activity in EFL classrooms that requires learners to plan, organize, and deliver spoken messages to an audience (King, 2002). While quantitative studies have often examined oral presentations in terms of performance improvement, qualitative research highlights the experiential nature of oral

presentations, focusing on learners' feelings, perceptions, and engagement during the process (Brooks & Wilson, 2015).

Oral presentations encourage learners to take ownership of their learning by selecting content, structuring ideas, and expressing meanings in their own words. However, research has also documented that oral presentations may evoke anxiety, particularly when learners feel unprepared or lack sufficient linguistic support (Al-Nakhalah, 2016). These findings suggest that the design of oral presentation tasks plays a crucial role in shaping learners' experiences.

Understanding how students experience oral presentations—whether as threatening or empowering activities—can offer valuable insights into how such tasks function in EFL classrooms. This perspective aligns with qualitative research goals that seek to explore learners' voices and classroom realities rather than focusing solely on outcomes.

Reading-Based Oral Presentations in Integrated Skills Instruction

Reading-based oral presentations integrate reading and speaking by requiring learners to transform written texts into spoken discourse. This instructional practice reflects the principles of the Integrated Skills Approach, which emphasizes the interrelated nature of language skills in authentic communication (Oxford, 2001). From a qualitative perspective, reading-based oral presentations can be viewed as spaces where learners negotiate meaning across modalities.

Studies on integrated skills instruction suggest that combining receptive and productive skills supports deeper language processing and learner engagement (Hinkel, 2010). Reading-based oral presentations allow learners to draw upon textual input while constructing spoken meanings, thereby facilitating a smoother transition from comprehension to production. Rather than focusing on accuracy alone, such activities encourage learners to interpret, summarize, and evaluate texts orally.

Despite the pedagogical potential of reading-based oral presentations, qualitative investigations into how learners experience these activities remain limited. Much of the existing research has focused on reading comprehension outcomes or speaking performance measures, leaving a gap in understanding learners' perspectives and meaning-making processes during reading-based oral presentation tasks.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by three complementary theoretical perspectives: the Integrated Skills Approach, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and Reader-Response Theory.

The Integrated Skills Approach emphasizes that language skills should be taught in an interconnected manner to reflect authentic language use (Oxford, 2001). From this perspective, reading-based oral presentations provide opportunities for learners to integrate comprehension and production in meaningful contexts.

Communicative Language Teaching prioritizes meaningful communication and learner interaction as central to language learning (Richards, 2006). Reading-based oral presentations align with CLT principles by engaging learners in purposeful speaking based on meaningful content.

Reader-Response Theory conceptualizes reading as an active meaning-making process shaped by readers' interpretations and experiences (Rosenblatt, 1994). When learners present their responses orally, they externalize their interpretations and engage in reflective and communicative practices that support both comprehension and speaking development.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive–interpretive approach to explore EFL learners’ experiences of reading-based oral presentation activities. Qualitative research is appropriate when the aim is to understand participants’ perspectives, meanings, and classroom experiences rather than to measure causal relationships or learning gains (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The focus of this study was not to evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional strategy quantitatively, but to investigate how students experience, perceive, and make meaning of reading-based oral presentations in an EFL classroom context. By adopting a qualitative approach, this study sought to capture learners’ voices and provide a rich description of classroom practices and learner engagement.

The study was conducted in an EFL classroom at a higher education institution in Indonesia. The participants were thirty-six students enrolled in an English speaking course during the 2025. The course incorporated reading-based oral presentation tasks as a regular instructional activity.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, as they had direct experience with the instructional practice being investigated (Patton, 2015). All participants were from National plus school who have been using English as their daily communication at school and were familiar with basic oral presentation formats.

Classroom observations were conducted during reading-based oral presentation sessions. The observations focused on students’ participation, interaction patterns, confidence, and engagement during the preparation and presentation stages. Field notes were taken to document notable behaviors, classroom dynamics, and emerging patterns related to students’ speaking experiences.

Semi-structured questionnaire was given to ten participants after they completed the oral presentation tasks. The questionnaire aimed to explore students’ perceptions of the activity, their feelings during preparation and presentation, and their views on how reading supported their speaking.

The questions were open-ended to allow participants to express their experiences freely. Examples of the questions included :

How did reading the text help you prepare for speaking?

How did you feel when presenting your ideas orally?

What challenges did you experience during the activity?

What are the pros and cons of this assignments ?

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The study revealed four major themes related to students’ experiences of reading-based oral presentations: Reading as Cognitive Support for Speaking; increased Confidence through Content Familiarity; Anxiety Negotiation and Gradual Adaptation; Ownership and Meaning Construction in Oral Expression. Most participants reported that reading provided them with ideas, vocabulary, and structure that supported their oral production. Students expressed that having access to a written text reduced the difficulty of generating ideas spontaneously.

One of the participants wrote that “*the assignment increases the reading comprehension ability and it is also a fun and informative way of improving English comprehension as it involves reading scientific or historical passages.*”

A second prominent theme was the role of content familiarity in enhancing students’ confidence. Participants frequently mentioned that understanding the material beforehand reduced nervousness during presentation. It indicates that familiarity with content contributed to a sense of preparedness, which in turn supported more confident participation. Rather than eliminating anxiety entirely, reading-based preparation appeared to help students manage it more effectively. Despite reporting increased confidence, many students acknowledged experiencing anxiety during initial presentations. However, they described a process of gradual adaptation over time. This suggests that reading-based oral presentations created a structured yet supportive environment where students could gradually build speaking comfort through repeated practice.

Another significant finding was students’ sense of ownership when presenting their interpretation of texts. Rather than reading aloud, students were encouraged to explain ideas in their own words. It reflects an active meaning-making process, where students transformed written input into personalized oral expression. The activity appeared to encourage interpretive engagement rather than passive reproduction.

Discussion

The findings provide insights into how reading-based oral presentations function as a meaningful integrated-skills activity in EFL classrooms. Reading provided linguistic resources and conceptual clarity that reduced cognitive load during speaking tasks.

From the perspective of the Integrated Skills Approach (Oxford, 2001), the findings demonstrate how receptive skills can support productive skills through meaningful integration. Students did not perceive reading and speaking as separate activities; rather, reading functioned as preparation for oral communication.

The findings also resonate with Communicative Language Teaching principles (Richards, 2006), which emphasize meaningful communication over isolated language drills. When students felt familiar with content, they were more willing to participate in communicative tasks.

The data suggest that confidence is not solely dependent on linguistic accuracy but also on conceptual preparedness. This insight contributes to existing discussions on speaking anxiety in EFL contexts, suggesting that structured reading input can mitigate communicative apprehension.

When students orally presented their interpretations, they externalized their understanding and engaged in dialogic meaning-making. Rather than merely transferring textual information, students reconstructed ideas through personal explanation and commentary. This supports the notion that reading-based oral presentations facilitate deeper cognitive processing and learner engagement.

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