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TABLE of CONTENTS

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ENHANCING CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING THROUGH ENGLISH ORAL PRESENTATIONS IN ONLINE LEARNING: A CONCEPTUAL EXPLORATION

Majdah Chulan[1]*, Mohamad Fadhili Yahaya[2] & Latisha Asmaak Shafie[3]

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to highlight the effectiveness of English oral presentation for enhancing the university students' critical thinking skills and creativity in online learning. Critical thinking and creativity are among the two most important skills demanded among the university students, particularly during English oral presentations in classroom. Students may find the task challenging because they are required to initially read, research, plan, write and finally present ideas creatively and critically in English. They must be creative when producing their ideas, and support them critically with logical explanations, details, and examples in front of their friends and lecturers. However, when Covid-19 pandemic occurred, face-to-face and online learning were the approaches for students to learn and educators to teach. The implementation of e-learning in teaching and learning process could be a way to realize this goal where technological tools usage has provided new opportunities to enhance the students' critical thinking and creativity in delivering their English oral presentation. Thus, an in-depth literature review was conducted within the realm of both thinking skills in relation to students' oral presentation. In addition, a conceptual framework which connects the relationship between the educators' feedback and digital tools used to develop, stimulate, and engage students' critical thinking and creativity is proposed for further exploration. This study contributes to the current literature on both thinking skills and its effectiveness on the university students' English oral presentation while emphasising the need for more research in this area.

1.   **Introduction**

Oral presentation is one of the most essential skills required for students in higher education and their future employability regardless of discipline or professional choice (Campbell et al., 2001; Morley, 2001; Thornbury, 2005 as cited in Iqbal et al., 2019). Students who possess oral presention abilities can actively engage in their education, exhibit their communication skills, and gain knowledge in a field that will be useful in their future careers. Oral presentation, as defined by Levin and Topping (2006), is a planned and practiced speech that is introduced by a presenter to an audience, not memorized or read from notes. Apart from that, Salem (2019) refers to the oral presentation as a formal communication with activities which deliver information to a group and it provides an opportunity for students to apply a second language in interactiong with others naturally. That is, students are given the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge through oral presentations, which also serve as a reference instructor based on the students' comprehension (Tsang, 2020).

Fallows and Steven (2000) claim that to succeed in the future workforce, graduates need employability skills such as the ability to retrieve and handle information; to communicate and do presentation; to plan and solve problems; to involve in social development and interaction; and to think creatively, and critically. As Trilling and Fadel (2009) state, when graduates join the workforce, employers are looking for those who are having good critical thinking rather than having highly specialized academic skills. As a result, graduates must be prepared to analyze, assess, and integrate information from a variety of sources in order to solve problems and come up with workable ideas for potential solutions (Richard & Rebecca, 2010). Therefore, it is very important for students to have the ability to think critically in order for them to survive and succeed in the rapidly changing workplaces (Foo & Quek, 2019).

It is believed that these skills need to be incorporated into the academic curriculum in universities and the relevance is to teach students how to prepare, organize and deliver successful oral presentations for professional purposes. As supported by Salem (2019), since presentation skills are being used more and more frequently in professional and academic evaluations, they are considered essential in university-level English language preparation programs. Nearly every syllabus includes oral presentation assessments, especially for ESL/EFL courses at higher education institutions (Razawi, Zulkornain & Mohd Razlan, 2019) Hence, giving oral presentation is the best practice to develop students' speaking skills and encourage active learning (Živković 2014; Suardika et al., 2023).

Despite learning English for more than 11 years, most university students in Malaysia are still unable to speak the language confidently in classroom, especially when delivering their oral presentation (Muhamad et al., 2013). One of the skills that students find challenging is oral presentation in which they are required to read, research, plan, write and present (Muhamad et al., 2013). Furthermore, they also have difficulties generating ideas and developing sentences in the speaking process. In other words, as stated by Kenayathulla et al. (2019), students still experience great anxiety while giving oral presentations in the English language. Based on this problem, the inability to deliver ideas orally is due to the lack of critical thinking (Mohd Asraf et al., 2023; Aouaf et al., 2023). Mohd Ashraf et al. (2023) further support that it is important for students to apply critical thinking because there are a lot of ideas or opinions that can be expressed and thus, it helps them to speak confidently. Arum and Roska (2011) believe that 99% of educators agree that one of the most necessary objectives of university education is the development of critical thinking abilities.

Independent studies on critical thinking and creative thinking have been widely conducted on the factors (Akmam et al., 2019), relationship (Bagheri, 2018; Nukhairo et al., 2019), learning strategies (Wu & Wu, 2020), and problem based learning (Birgli, 2015). However, only few studies focused on both thinking skills in relation to online learning (Riadi et al., 2021; Basu, 2020) Thus, this study attempts to conceptually review the English oral presentation as a mechanism to improve university students' critical thinking and creativity in online learning. It explores the concept of online learning, digital tools, and educators' feedback as the missing elements in English oral presentation, which are seen as the effective ways to learn the language and be a better speaker.

2.   Objective of the Paper

The main objective of this paper is to conceptualize the application of oral presentations as a mechanism to improve university students' critical thinking and creativity in online learning.

3.   Literature Review

This review addresses the relevant concepts in relation to oral presentation skills, critical thinking, and creativity of university students in classroom as well as online learning.

Oral Presentation Skills

A study by Rahmat, Shahabani and Ibrahim (2020) revealed that some students are nervous about giving presentation in front of an audience because they believe that their knowledge is insufficient. They fear that they will be misinterpreted or that their message will not be understood. That is, students are afraid of oral presentation due to their own characteristics and the environment they are put in (Rahmat, 2019). On the other hand, Barrett and Liu (2019) investigated how English academic oral presentations via a blended language learning environment were designed by students. The results of the study showed that group oral presentations have improved, with stronger introductions, linking devices, and visual elements but students have problems constructing conclusions and linking the main ideas to the content.

Besides that, a study by Riadil (2020) focused on the impact of oral presentation in developing the students' ability to speak English. Furthermore, the researcher would like to know the students' difficulties in delivering their oral presentations in EFL classrooms of higher education context. The findings of this study revealed that the students' oral presentations do affect their speaking abilities. Meanwhile, Agustina (2019), investigated 32 students of the Accounting Department-State Polytechnic of Malang, Indonesia on their self-confidence and the ability to speak in English when presenting a business meeting project. The result revealed that most students show great improvement in their speaking skill due to their interest and strong motivation when participating in this learning activity. Meanwhile, a quatitative research conducted by Amir, Rahmat, Sim, Sukimin, Mohamad Radzi and Md Raus (2022) investigated on how common oral presentations are among second-language English learners. There were 56 respondents involved in this survey. The results indicated that internal and external factors contribute to the presenters fear of oral presentation.

Hence, oral presentations in English, particularly in online settings, simulate real-world scenarios where students must communicatively and convincingly express their views. Past studies demonstrated that the positive impact of oral presentations on critical and creative thinking skills

highlight how important they are in preparing students for workplace demands (Al Mamun, 2024; Dung, 2024).

Critical Thinking Skill and Creativity in Online Learning

Through history, the critical thinking concept has been studied and explored by different academicians and researchers (Enciso et al., 2017). There have been three approaches identified to define and integrate critical thinking into education and they are philosophical, psychological and educational approaches (Lai, 2011). Lai (2011) also defined from the field of psychology that critical thinking is a process which involves mental activities. As for the education field, critical thinking is used interchangeably with higher order thinking from Bloom taxonomy. However, Cáceres et al. (2020) argued that it depends on how the skill is used. This study agrees with John Dewey's point of view that critical thinking starts when students are engaged with a problem. Therefore, it is suggested the critical thinking can be defined as "an individual thought process that begins with the intent to solve a problem or to answer a question, by examining different options and choosing the most suitable and logical one" (Asleh, 2020, p.21).

Another skill that needs to be focused on is creative thinking skills. According to Lennon (2014), principles of critical thinking often include elements of creativity, curiosity, and deliberation. In addition, creativity is not confined to art only but is also expressed in academic and social situations through collaboration, sense-making, and meaning-making (Badger, 2019). According to Jankowska and Karwowski (2015), creativity can be understood as a synonym of divergent thinking alone, since it involves deductive and inductive thinking, as well as the use of problem-solving strategies to generate novel insights and solutions. A creative person exhibits originality in thought and ideas and sees things in new ways. As an illustration, Mahdia, Sukarmanb and Yokc (2015) had conducted a survey on 100 respondents who were the participants and non-participants of innovation, invention and design project, IID. Based on their findings, students who were the participants of the project were more confident, motivated communicative and were able to work in teams compared to those who did not participate.

Many past studies support that online learning is selected as a supportive media in developing the students' critical thinking and creativity (Zare et al., 2016). deNoyelles and Reyes-Foster (2015) in their study found that using word cloud in online discussion can prompt the act of problem solving. Meanwhile, Wardani et al. (2019) found that there is a significant and strong correlation between information system media and critical thinking skills. Meanwhile, a study by Hussin et al. (2019) suggested that online platform is better when lecturers start the discussion of tasks, ask questions, and encourage students to develop their critical and creative thinking. The students might require answering the questions posed. Besides that, according to Toshpulvatova and Kinjemuratova (2020), the main strategies needed to develop critical thinking skills are evaluating information, analyzing, logical reasoning, arguing, reflecting, and problem solving, and these strategies are significant to be enhanced in the academic English language classes.

Apart from that, Riadi et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative descriptive study on 74 students in one of the public high schools in Bandar Lampung, Class X SMA Negeri 9 Bandar Lampung, Indonesia. The reseachers investigated how students' critical thinking and creativity were empowered in online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. They found that teachers need to design online learning to assist students to empower both their thinking skills and interact actively between them and the students. Thus, since online learning environments are becoming more and more common in educational institutions across the globe, it is crucial to include CT skills into these learning setting (Bachtiar, 2024).

English Oral Presentations as a Tool for Enhancing University Students' Critical Thinking and Creativity in Online Learning

Previously, students learned and did oral presentations in classroom but today, educators and students begin to shift their mindset into using technology in teaching and learning process. Due to this reason, new discoveries and digital tools have been constantly expanding, which has led students to become more creative as well. As Nussbaum et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of critical thinking and creativity in online learning, where they specifically highlight the potential for technology to facilitate the development of these skills.

It is believed that to survive in this competitively changing world, the most crucial skills to be developed are critical thinking and creative thinking because these abilities are beneficial for personal, educational, and economic growth (Chen, 2013). He further stated that to be a better thinker, these two thinking processes need to be combined. In addition, Henriksen et al. (2016) also suggested that it is significant to explore the relationship between these two constructs across varied, global educational contexts. According to Zubaidah (2018), all graduates must have the 4Cs—creativity, cooperation, critical thinking, and communication to succeed in the Revolution Era 4.0. In fact, higher education is gaging towards the need of 21st century demand in producing professional students who are not only excellent in academic but are also critical and creative in solving problems. Kabilan (2000) claimed that students can only become proficient language users if they are able to demonstrate creative and critical thinking through the language, apart from using it and knowing its meaning. That is, they must be creative when producing their ideas, and support them critically with logical explanation, details, and examples. As Husna (2017) asserted that critical thinking skills need to be developed in order one to be creative.

Undoubtedly, electronic technologies usage has led to the development of educational opportunities and thus, it helps students to develop their skills (Zare et al., 2016). Robilos (2021) conducted a study on 30 intact groups of students who were using LoiLooNote digital graphic organizer (digital GO) for their oral presentation in a public university in Thailand. The result indicated the digital GO usage increases not only the students' oral presentation performance but also their critical thinking skill. Meanwhile, Elyana et al. (2018) did a pilot survey on 35 respondents utilizing digital technology for a project presentation. They found the digital technology and software usage enhance the students' creativity and confidence. As supported by Hussin et al. (2019), the increasing use of technologies in learning institutions, particularly during online learning, has changed the way students' study, interact, and think.

Importance of Feedback and Students' Engagement

Generally, giving and receiving feedback after the presentation is considered useful to students. They will receive feedback from their lecturers after their oral presentations. An experimental study by van Ginkel et al. (2019) examined the first-year undergraduate students who practiced their presentations in a virtual environment. They received feedback produced by the system, on their presentation competence components such as cognition, behaviour and attitudes. The researchers also investigated the effectiveness of a virtual reality-based task for delivering the feedback. Furthermore, a study by van Ginkel et al. (2020) was conducted with 22 pre-university students enrolled in a presentation skills course within a Dutch secondary education curriculum in the school year of 2018. The participants were categorised into two feedback conditions: immediate and delayed. Results of the study indicated students in both groups made

significant development in all presentation criteria across the two-week programme. This helps the students to develop communication skills within the group and relate to 'action learning' processes in which a student works in a group on real world challenges, becoming more critical throughout the process (Charlesworth, 2018). A study by Xu et al. (2021) investigated the role of educator's feedback in an online business English presentations during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was found that EFL learners' attitudes were quite positive toward the educator's feedback. As supported by Ndolo (2021), higher education educators can effectively give feedback to students in an online learning environment that fosters their ability to think critically and creatively.

Besides that, students' engagement and participation are important to ensure the effectiveness of online oral presentation. During online presentation, students should contribute ideas and apply creativity without being influenced by others. By doing this, engagement may lead to a more systematic and critical way of thinking. Besides that, Ho (2022) believed it is significant to integrate and implement the online peer review into undergraduates' oral presentations The main purpose of the integration is to bridge the gap between tertiary education and the workplace, equipping students with better oral presentation skills. As a result, they could learn and improve their oral presentation throughout the semester in online English classroom. Besides that, a study by Gokgoz-Kurt (2023) investigated a total of thirty-two university students who used an online platform to provide feedback anonymously on their classmates' oral presentations over a four-week period. They enrolled in an upper-intermediate to advanced-level rhetoric and oral communication class. The researcher intended to learn more about the types and targets of peer feedback provided by EFL speakers, as well as their opinions and experiences with mobile-assisted peer feedback. The results showed that the students' feedback mostly covered positive comments than negative ones. The three main categories covered by both types of feedback are oral presenting skills, speaking performance, and presentation content.

Based on the literature above, there is a need for conceptualizing the application of oral presentations as a mechanism to improve university students' critical thinking and creativity in online learning.

4.   PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on Figure 1, the proposed conceptual framework for this study describes the relationships between the concepts of these six (6) constructs: 1) critical thinking, which is the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information logically to make reasoned judgments and solve problems effectively; 2) creativity, is the capability to generate original ideas, innovate, and approach problems or tasks in new, imaginative ways; 3) educators' feedback refers to constructive responses and guidance provided by teachers to support the improvement of students' learning, development, and performance; 4) digital tools usage is the digital technologies integration and application such as software, apps and online platforms to enhance teaching and learning, 5) oral presentation is defined as the skill of delivering effectively spoken content to an audience with clarity, organization, and confidence; and 6) online learning refers to a mode of education where students use digital platforms via the internet to access courses and learning materials and engage in remote or virtual instruction.

This framework intends to integrate the educators' feedback and digital tools usage as these could develop, stimulate, and engage students' complex thinking process skills in delivering their English oral presentations. Digital tools such as learning management systems (e.g., Google Classroom, Ufuture), and online platforms (e.g., Google Meet, Microsoft Teams) facilitate educators' feedback by making the process more efficient, accessible, and interactive. For instance, real time feedback often applies whenever students are using video conferencing

platforms like Google Meet, Zoom or Webex for their online presentation. That is, educators can directly comment on the tasks, offer corrections, suggestions, and praise during or immediately after the presentation. In addition, this enables educators to provide timely, personalized, and detailed feedback to students while they are presenting. By receiving constructive feedback through digital platforms, it allows students to continuously revise and refine their arguments and reasoning and experiment with new ideas like trying new presentation styles using Canva. This helps students to evaluate their work critically and encourage them to think outside the box, promoting both critical thinking and creativity. This indicates that digital communication is particularly relevant as it becomes more integral in both academic and professional contexts.

The cognitive skills which are the students' critical thinking and creativity need to be enhanced as they engage in their English oral presentation in online learning. As supported by Saleh (2019), the concept of critical thinking is applicable to all areas of knowledge and encourages learners to engage in the process of knowledge creation and deep reflection. This directly supports the notion that digital tools and feedback can promote students' critical thinking by providing opportunities for reflective practice during oral presentations. For example, by using video feedback tools, students can reflect on their presentation performance, which engages them in self-assessment and analysis of their own content and delivery. This reflection fosters students' deeper engagement with their materials, thus sharpening their critical thinking skills. Besides that, Meyers (1986) identified four (4) main elements which support the critical thinking development; a) stimulating students' interest, b) creating meaningful discussion, c) exposing students to ideas and viewpoints of others, and d) fostering a supportive and trusting atmosphere.

These elements strengthen the role of educators' feedback in this conceptual framework. Students' critical thinking can be directly stimulated by timely, constructive, and supportive feedback that push them to rethink their ideas, sharpen their reasoning, and examine different points of view. This aligns with the framework which uses feedback as a tool to stimulate critical thinking and creativity in students as they develop their oral presentation abilities. Therefore, the relationships between critical thinking, creativity, feedback, and digital tools usage can be directly informed by Salleh's (2019) and Meyer's (1986) findings which further integrate these ideas into the framework.

The ability to think critically and creatively is essential not only in an online learning environment but also in the 21st century workplace. These skills prepare students by being more innovative, problem solvers and adaptive to new situations in order to face real-world challenges. As the framework indicates, digital tools and feedback support the development of students' critical thinking and creativity in their oral presentation, which are relevant in both academic and professional settings. The proposed framework can significantly improve students' critical thinking and creativity, which will benefit their academic achievement and future professional skills.
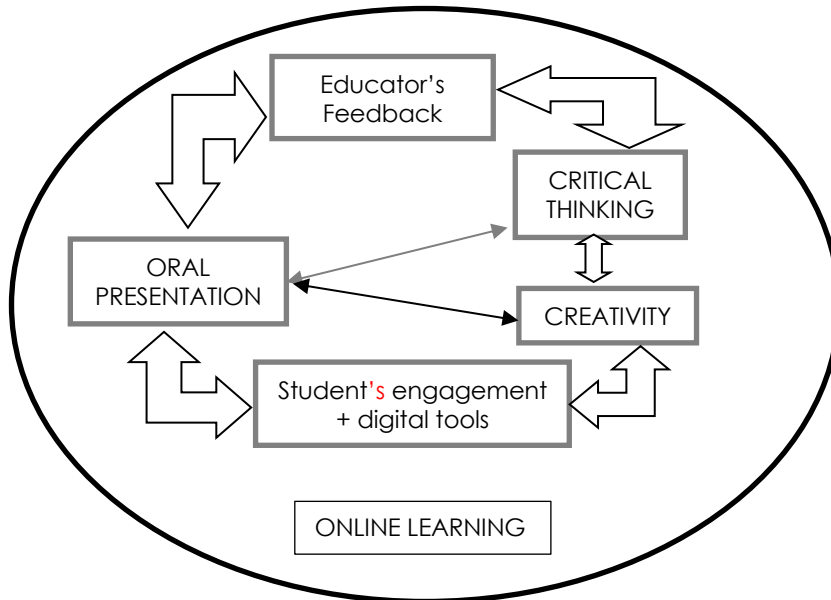
Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework

5.   Conclusion

This conceptual paper on the application of oral presentations as a mechanism to improve university students' critical thinking and creativity in online learning is far from being comprehensive. The concept of critical thinking and creativity is relatively less studied as the measures of these skills depend on subjective indirect display of behaviour from the source. However, the study on both skills is significant as it provides an insight into the underlying issues that affect the university students' English oral presentations in online learning. The trend is that today, many higher educational systems have transitioned to online learning underscores the need for studies that explore effective methods for teaching critical and creative thinking in such environment. Past literature which identifies oral presentations as a key tool for fostering both critical and creative thinking (Ati & Parmawati, 2022; Al Mamun, 2024) is thus highly relevant in the current context where many institutions are emphasizing online learning. It is recommended that future researchers will be able to improve the ability of online learning management systems so that university students can better deliver their English oral presentations. As for the lecturers, it is crucial for them to improvise their teaching strategies to help students increase both their critical and creative thinking skills, particularly in their oral presentation

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Authors Contributions

Majdah Chulan led this study and wrote the paper; Mohamad Fadhili Yahaya & Latisha Asmaak Shafie supervised, reviewed, and improved the article.

Conflict of Interest

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