THE USE OF POWERPOINT IN GROUP PRESENTATIONS: INSIGHTS FROM ELT MAJORS

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Abstract: The current study investigates the attitudes of ELT majors toward the use of PowerPoint in group presentations and how they use the software when presenting. Data were collected via questionnaire, interview, and class observation. The results indicate that the majority of ELT majors have positive attitudes toward the use of PowerPoint in group presentations for their user-friendly quality and multimedia functions with various audio-visual features. Group members usually prepare slides individually, then one of them combines all the slides to create a slideshow. During presentations, ELT majors rely on the key points in the slides to talk, but most of them just read from the slides. They also claim to make use of the archiving and display functions of PowerPoint to create activities that help to reinforce and review the content presented. From the findings, suggestions to group members to review the contents and rules to design slides for presentations are put forward.

Keywords: PowerPoint, ELT major, group presentation

1. Introduction

The integration of technology into education, in general, and in English language teaching (ELT), in particular, has been of great necessity for its enhanced benefits to both teaching and learning. In English classes, for example, the use of technological devices and applications can serve as audio-visual aids. Microsoft PowerPoint or PowerPoint, in short, is the artifact often used to present key points, especially in group presentations. This study was set out to explore this specific aspect of technology applications by ELT majors at a university context.

1.1. Necessity of using technology in teaching and learning English

It is believed that the "Chalk and Talk" teaching method is not sufficient in teaching and learning English in this digital time [22] The application of technology in EFL classes is considered to enhance the autonomy and motivation of students' learning and expand the interaction ability of learners with the subject matter, teachers, and classmates. That is why technology is increasingly being promulgated as a powerful mechanism that can transform

education [5, 7, 9]. In EFL classes, technology, in general, and PowerPoint, in particular, is often used to create interactive effects in the classroom. In sociocultural theory, technology, in general, and other forms of devices, such as computers and softwares, can serve to mediate learners' thinking process, which facilitates learning [15, 11].

PowerPoint is a type of presentation software that allows users to show colored texts and images with animations and sounds. PowerPoint presentation has been in existence in general education for many years for teaching, student projects, practice and drilling, games, reviews, and tests. In EFL classrooms for the last few decades, PowerPoint has become an indispensable teaching and learning aid [8]. It helps to create audio, visual, as well as audio-visual effects, in the classrooms, which contributes to attract and sustain students' attention. For many ELT majors today, when group presentation is considered to be a mandatory requirement, PowerPoint is seen as an effective tool to make their work more convenient and effective [17]. Bulter-Pascoe [2] argues that PowerPoint slideshows are useful pedagogical tools to be used in English instructions for visual and oral explanations of specific contents and concepts. Nouri and Shahid [16] claim that when used appropriately, PowerPoint enhances teachers' teaching and learners' motivation.

1.2. Use of PowerPoint in group presentations

PowerPoint is probably the best-known presentation graphics program available. Kheira and Zamzam [10] point out that using PowerPoint in presentations can enrich the information presented in a lesson and make the presentation more organized and flexible. PowerPoint is a multimedia software, so it allows users to create interactive presentations containing text, art, animation, and audio and video elements. Besides, presenters can use graphics, animation, and sound to emphasize the main ideas, which helps the audience get the important information presented. With diverse functions, PowerPoint software allows users to create interesting presentations to attract listeners. In addition, during PowerPoint presentations, presenters can improve their communication skills with the audience, which is contrary to the conventional speaking presentations in which the presenter talks and the audience only listen.

Some critics, however, have negative opinions on using PowerPoint in group presentations. Tufte [24, p. 3], for example, believes that the software's rigid format "usually weakens verbal and spatial reasoning, and almost always corrupts statistical analysis". It is also argued that depending on PowerPoint makes the speakers become readers, not presenters. Presentations will become boring when the speaker does not use spoken language to analyze, explain, and interpret ideas but only read what is available on slides. Furthermore, the content of the presentation will get a low quality due to the lack of investment. Using pictures, videos,

charts, and music will enrich the content of the presentation. However, investing too much time in these will bring disadvantages.

1.3. Previous studies related to the current research

Numerous studies on using PowerPoint in teaching and learning languages exist in the literature. For example, Uz et al. [25] aim at finding out what prospective teachers think of the use of PowerPoint presentations in their courses to identify which factors students are pleased with and which factors could be improved. The results show that prospective teachers had positive attitudes toward the use of PowerPoint presentations in their courses. Besides, it was found that the quality of the PowerPoint presentations varied according to the instructors because they did not know how to prepare PowerPoint presentations.

Next, Oommen [17] focuses on what the participant learners perceived about the use of PowerPoint presentations in English classroom instruction and whether the PowerPoint presentations contributed to better learning. The study also compared learning with PowerPoint with the traditional oral presentations with a teacher writing on the board. The results show that the majority of learners preferred PowerPoint presentations to the traditional methods of lecture delivery because PowerPoint presentations were reported to be beneficial in terms of entertainment, information, understanding, organization, and helpfulness in English classrooms.

Dashtestani [6] investigates students' acceptance and perspectives of PowerPoint presentations as learning tools in an English-for-academic-purposes context. This research reveals that a few potential obstacles to the use of PowerPoint technology in academic English courses arose. Despite the presence of these impediments, the findings confirm that the academic English students perceived PowerPoint as a beneficial and effective learning tool, which should be incorporated into academic English courses.

Pao-Nan et al. [19] conduct a study on PowerPoint, Prezi applications, and the effects of varied digital presentation tools on students' learning performance in Taiwan. The results show that Prezi was a more effective instructional medium for knowledge acquisition compared with traditional instruction. However, PowerPoint demonstrated instructional effectiveness on the long-term learning retention of the students compared with the traditional method.

In Vietnam, only a few studies deal with using PowerPoint presentations in teaching and learning languages. For example, Nam and Lap [23] study the impact of implementing PowerPoint in teaching vocabulary in English classes in a Vietnamese secondary education setting. The study, with a two-group pre-test and post-test design, aimed to test the effects of PowerPoint on learners' vocabulary retention and to investigate their attitudes towards the use

of PowerPoint-based materials in teaching and learning vocabulary. Sixty-eight grade 10 students in an upper-secondary school in the Mekong Delta participated in the study. The results indicate that participants in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group in terms of vocabulary retention, and their attitudes towards the use of PowerPoint in teaching and learning vocabulary were positive.

Son [19] explores the effectiveness of using PowerPoint in teaching English via a survey on students' performance in learning English with the assistance of PowerPoint. The finding is that the application of PowerPoint in teaching English did not always bring positive effectiveness. Without good preparation and a combination of various methodologies, the application could cause unavoidable negative effects.

In addition, Thai and Huan [21] investigate the teachers' perceptions of PowerPoint use as a tool for teaching vocabulary in Vietnam. The data were collected from questionnaires and interviews with sixty EFL teachers. The findings reveal that the participating teachers claimed that PowerPoint is a useful instructional tool for vocabulary instruction. They also reported obstacles such as time investment, insufficient knowledge in information technology, and lack of technology facilities when applying the software.

There have been numerous studies on applying technology, specifically PowerPoint, in language teaching and learning in the literature. However, a study focusing on one aspect of using PowerPoint in English learning, more specifically, how the software is used in group presentations by ELT majors, has not been documented in the literature. On this ground, the current study was set out to answer the following questions:

1. What are ELT majors' attitudes toward the use of PowerPoint in group presentations?

2. How do ELT majors use PowerPoint in group presentations?

2. Methodology

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were combined to collect and analyze data. Quantitative data are the information "gathered by using those measures that lend themselves to being turned into numbers and statistics" [3, p. 249]; whereas qualitative method is the method that collects data by studying participant's perspective, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, ideals, and actions in natural situations [13]. The combination of the two methods is considered to provide quality information and results [20].

The participants of this study include 100 ELT majors from a university in Vietnam. The reason for choosing this group of students is that they have already had more than three years in learning English, and they have done frequent group presentations by using PowerPoint in

their program that puts much emphasis on group presentations in all the prescribed subjects. Besides, when they become English teachers, they will also use PowerPoint in their future teaching. All participants were invited to fill a questionnaire, and 10 of them participated in the interview. Besides, five group presentations with PowerPoint were chosen for observation.

The questionnaire consists of 20 questions, of which the first 10 items focused on ELT majors' attitudes toward using PowerPoint in group presentations. The other 10 items aim at investigating how ELT majors used PowerPoint in group presentations. The interview was based on a list of eight questions focusing on how the students used PowerPoint in group presentations. The observation was facilitated with an observation sheet to see how students used PowerPoint in group presentations in the classroom. The questionnaire was delivered first to collect data with all the participants. The review of the questionnaires helped to facilitate the design of the questions for the interview. The class observation was carried out last to explore the reality of the use of PowerPoint in group presentations.

3. Results

3.1. ELT majors' attitudes toward the use of PowerPoint in group presentations

The data from the questionnaire, relating to ELT majors' opinions of using PowerPoint in group presentations, are presented in Chart 1.

It can be clearly seen from the chart that 48.5% of the students strongly agreed, and 40.4% agreed that PowerPoint is useful for group presentations. About 9% of them were not sure about the use of PowerPoint. Only 1% strongly disagreed, and 2% disagreed with the use of PowerPoint in their group presentations. This data suggest that PowerPoint is widely accepted in group presentations by ELT majors.
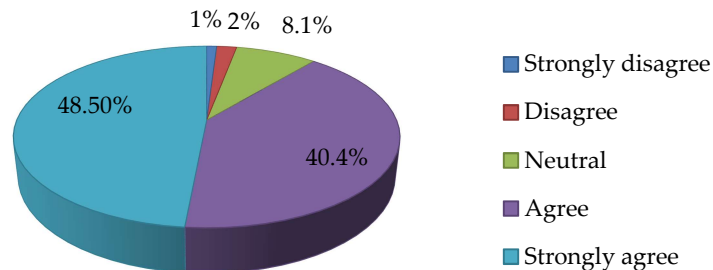

Chart 1. ELT majors' opinion toward the usefulness of PowerPoint in group presentations

Students' evaluation of the software is further strengthened through the evidence gathered from interviews. When the students were asked in the interview, "What do you think about using PowerPoint in presentations in your major of ELT?", all of them said that PowerPoint is necessary and helpful for group presentations in their field of study. For example, in the interview, one respondent said,

> The use of PowerPoint in group presentations for ELT major was quite necessary because it was a great support tool for students to easily express knowledge during group presentations. It also created excitement for listeners. (Interview, student 1)

Similarly, another respondent stated, "The use of PowerPoint in group presentations was very useful because it helped presenters not only illustrate their ideas through images and sounds easily but also attract listeners."

In addition, when asked in the interview about the frequency of using PowerPoint in group presentations, all of the ten participants said that they always used PowerPoint for their group presentations. This finding suggests that the students highly approved the software use. The questionnaire was also used to investigate the attitudes of presenters and audiences toward the use of PowerPoint in group presentations. The data for this theme are presented in Chart 2.

As can be seen from the chart, 38% of the students agreed, and 45% strongly agreed; whereas, only 1% of the students strongly disagreed, 2% disagreed, and 14% did not know whether using PowerPoint helped them to explain the topic of group presentations easily or not. Furthermore, 52% agreed, and 28% strongly agreed that they felt more confident in group presentations with PowerPoint. These numbers indicate that most of ELT majors regarded PowerPoint as a supportive tool for their presentations.

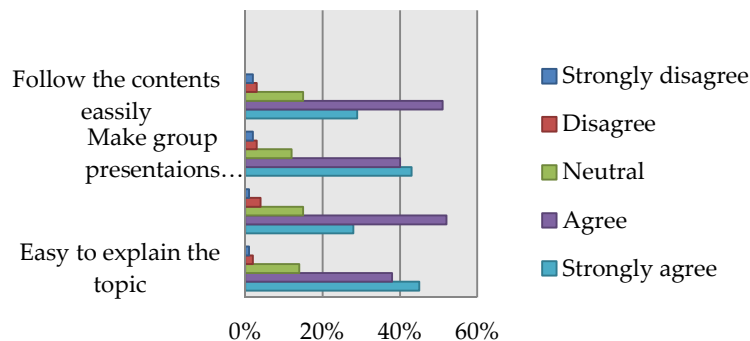In addition, Chart 2 shows that 45% of the students strongly agreed that, as audiences,

Chart 2. Perceived benefits of the use of PowerPoint in group presentations

group presentations with PowerPoint are more interesting than traditional oral presentations (43%). Besides, 40% of them agreed that they felt more interested in group presentations with PowerPoint. The data from the chart additionally point out that up to 51% of the students agreed, and 29% strongly agreed that they could follow the contents of the group presentations easily thanks to the main points shown on the slides. The number of students who felt difficult to get what was being presented on PowerPoint is a minority; just 2% of the students who strongly disagreed, 3% disagreed, while 15% had neutral attitudes.

From the analysis of the data collected from the questionnaires and interviews, it can be concluded that the majority of students in the current study have a positive attitude towards the use of PowerPoint in their group presentations. Most of them, as presenters or listeners, claimed to benefit from the use of PowerPoint in group presentations. As stated by [17], PowerPoint is regarded as an effective pedagogical tool in the classroom. It is a multimedia presentation software in which users can employ features such as adding sounds, images, colors, and animations to make their presentations more attractive and engaging. This is why PowerPoint is highly appreciated and used by the students in this study in group presentations.

3.2. How ELT majors use PowerPoint in group presentations

Slide content preparation

The data from the questionnaire relating to how ELT majors used PowerPoint to prepare
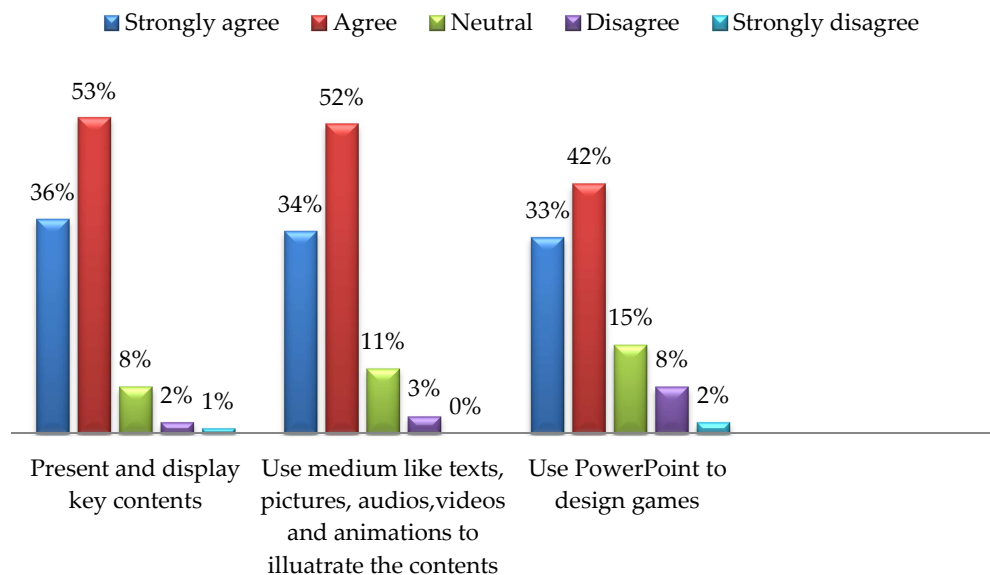

Chart 3. Content Preparation with PowerPoint

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for the group presentation are presented in Chart 3.

It can be seen from the chart that the majority of students claimed that they used PowerPoint to present the main ideas of the presentation (53% for "agree" and 36% for "strongly agree"). However, a small number of presenters (3%) replied in the questionnaire that they displayed all the contents on the slideshows.

Interviews with students yielded similar results. Most students responded that they and their team members spent time on researching the contents of the topic at first, then they listed out the main points needed to be shown on the slide to make presentations in front of the class. Some students also provided additional information that sometimes their friends would show the whole contents because they did not know exactly which content should be shown. Some of their responses are as follows:

> "My team members and I often design slides in a simple way. We divide the contents for the members. Next, we study the contents to draw out keywords or main ideas in order to display on the slides and then find images, charts or videos to illustrate the contents", reported by interviewee 4.

> "Each person will be responsible for preparing the content for each different section. Team members often read the book and draw out the main ideas to present. However, sometimes there are some members typing the whole contents in the book on slides", reported by interviewee 9.

However, using slides in group presentations may lead to several disadvantages. First, the listener may feel tired because they have to look at so many words shown on the screen. Second, so much information is provided on the screen makes the audience difficult to grasp the main content to remember. Last, full of information on the screen makes the audience focus on reading instead of listening to the speaker. Therefore, carefully researching the contents and selecting the main ideas to be presented on the slides are extremely important and contribute to the success of the presentations.

After determining the main contents to present, the next step is applying the medium to transmit and explain the main contents to the audiences with clear, lively, and attractive ways. According to [17], users can take advantage of the strength of PowerPoint that permits users to import graphics, audios, quotes, and music or to link to simulations or Web pages to bring an enriching learning experience for audiences. It is not denied that inserting images, sounds, videos, and charts into presentations makes them more effective than only using words. Bartsch and Cobern [1, p. 85] state, "Graphics are not necessary for simple declarative information, but may help with more difficult, complex, or abstract concepts presented through lectures". Sometimes, a picture or video is more powerful than a thousand words. Presenting ideas and topics without visual examples is difficult to convey information fully and accurately. It is the

multimedia functions of PowerPoint that make group presentations more interesting than oral traditional presentations. Hence, 34% and 52% of the respondents reported their approval and strong approval of using PowerPoint as a multimedia medium to enrich their presentations in the questionnaire.

Besides questionnaire data, class observations reveal that all the presenting groups used pictures to illustrate the contents. For example, when presenting about types of tests, ELT majors attached real tests so that listeners could easily capture the contents. Other features widely used by the participants are diagrams, charts, and tables. All the observed groups used the diagrams from the beginning of the lesson to draw the outlines. Two of the five groups used tables to compare the information.

As Oommen [17, p. 54) indicates, "PowerPoint presentations can be used in the classroom for initial teaching, student projects, practice and drilling, games, reviews, and tests". Group presentations are successful when the speakers can convey the main contents to the audiences, and the audiences can obtain information. Therefore, designing activities to check and review the main contents is extremely necessary. One of the powerful functions of PowerPoint is that it allows users to design multiple programs to help them check or review the presented information. Users often also use games that are designed by PowerPoint applications because the games bring more relaxation and fun for the classroom. That is why up to 75% of the students in this study stated that they used PowerPoint to design games, and 15% reported to rely on this mode occasionally. Besides, 10% responded to use other forms for checking or reviewing the contents of presentations.

Designing PowerPoint slides for group presentations

According to Caputo [4], one of the guidelines for using PowerPoint is considering a background that should be clear and bright enough for audiences to see the contents. Besides, the size of the font must be large enough to ensure that everybody can see the contents. In general, the observations in the current study reveal that the form of slides of the presenting groups should be simple, clear, and easy to see with a bright background, highlighted headings, and different sizes of font. For example, through observations, it was found that groups one and two chose contrastive colors between the background and the contents to highlight the contents, such as white backgrounds and black fonts. However, the other two groups chose dark backgrounds as well as dark fonts to present the contents, which made the audiences difficult to see the contents. Furthermore, the size of the font was not large enough for all the audiences to see clearly.

One of the issues that emerge from the interviews with the students in this study is the way the students divided the task of designing slideshows for their group presentations. The results obtained from students' responses in the interviews show two clear themes about how students designed slideshows for group presentations. The first is that each member of the group designed their presentation, then gathered with other members. Another is that members sent the contents to the other ones who are good at using PowerPoint to design for the whole team to ensure the consistency of forms. For example, one respondent said, "*Each person prepares the contents and makes slides himself/herself. Then, he/she sends to other members who are responsible for synthesizing all the slides into a complete presentation*."

Another respondent said in the interview, "*When designing slides, I will choose a general form for all members. Each person will fill the content into the provided form, then send the slides back to me so that I can do the effects, arrange the layout as well as add the images for all slides to create a complete slideshow for our group presentation.*" One respondent also stated, "*Each person in the group will prepare the content and then send it to me so that I can make slideshows for the whole group*".

Using PowerPoint in group presentations

The data from the questionnaire relating to how ELT majors used PowerPoint to present are displayed in Chart 4.

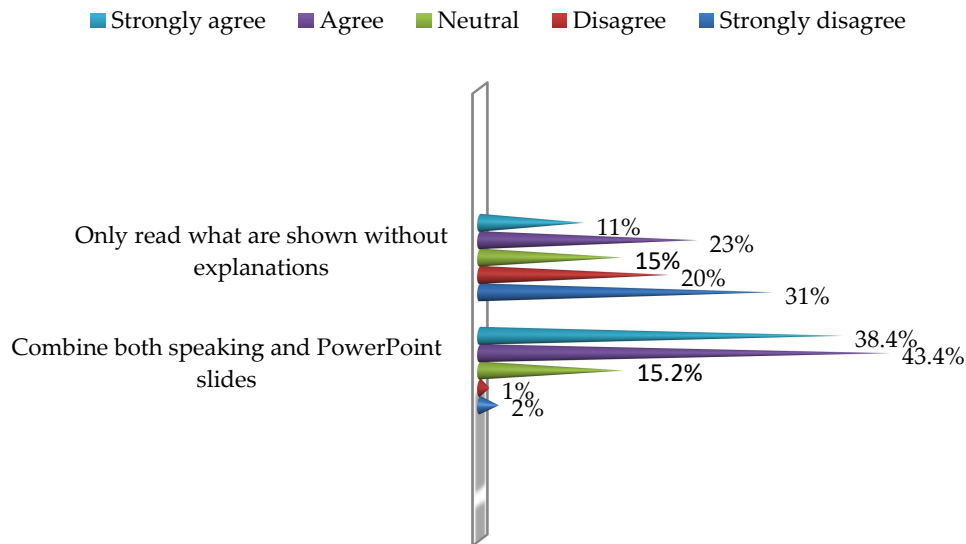It can be seen from the chart that the participants reported about how they used

Chart 4. How ELT Majors Use PowerPoint in Group Presentations

PowerPoint to present their group presentations. About 51% of the respondents answered in the questionnaire that they presented the contents shown in the slides and gave explanations to help the audiences understand clearly, while the percentages of presenters who only read the contents without any explanations are quite high, with agreement at 23% and strong agreement at 11%.

In the interview, several interviewees stated that sometimes their friends only read what was shown on the slides and terminate their presentations without giving any explanations. This shows that besides using PowerPoint as a support tool to make presentations more effective and engaging, a number of students depended greatly on PowerPoint. They only read what was shown on the slides, which means the role of the presenter as a guider and conveyer is not promoted because listeners only read the contents presented without listening to the speaker.

In the questionnaire, most students responded that they combined both speaking and PowerPoint slides to present, with a rate of agreement at 43.4% and strong agreement at 38%, while 15% of students stated that they used it occasionally (with 1% of agreement and 2% of strong disagreement).

In fact, class observations show that many students were proficient in using PowerPoint in group presentations. They combined the slides smoothly with speaking to present and interpret the contents. The structure of a group presentation was that the presenters used words to reinterpret the information and contents about the particular topic on the slides.

4. Discussion

This study is set out to investigate ELT majors' attitudes toward the use of PowerPoint and how they used the software in group presentations. In general, students' responses to the questionnaire show that they had positive attitudes toward using PowerPoint in group presentations. The reason for their high evaluation of PowerPoint in group presentations is because this application is user-friendly. Besides, it is easy to manipulate the functions of PowerPoint. Hence, users can grasp how to use the basic features after only a short time exploring them. Simplicity, ease of use, and effectiveness are the other reasons for the widespread use of PowerPoint, as reported in the questionnaire by the participants in this study. In comparison with group presentations without using PowerPoint, those who use the software are more successful in their group presentations. The findings of this study are consistent with those of previous authors [17, 6, 12, 14]. It could also be inferred from the

participants' responses in the interview that they rely on PowerPoint as a tool that mediates their thinking during the preparation and the very presentation [11].

PowerPoint is an application with various functions that allow users to create vivid, diverse, and attractive group presentations. The results from the data collected through the questionnaires, interview questions, and classroom observations in this study show that the participants use PowerPoint in the ways that respond to the requirements of group presentations. They take advantage of its various functions to create presentations to serve academic purposes. PowerPoint allows presenters to make the contents clear and effective by using images, charts, and sounds. Besides, the listeners can easily capture the contents through the keywords or the main ideas highlighted on the screen. Therefore, PowerPoint enhances and enriches learners' experience in their study. The findings of the current study are in line with those of Oommen [17] who reports that PowerPoint is beneficial in terms of entertainment, information, understanding, organization, and helpfulness in English classrooms.

With archiving and display functions, PowerPoint allows the creation of activities that help reinforce and review the contents presented. "The learners particularly considered the easy revision and review aspects of PowerPoint presentation more valuable" [17, p. 59]. It seems that the presenters in the current study take advantage of this value of PowerPoint successfully. Similarly, Pao-Nan et al. [19] find that PowerPoint demonstrates instructional effectiveness on the long-term learning retention of the students compared with traditional instructions. Due to the nature of group presentations, the participants in this study do not report content retention but confirm that the application helps them to remember the contents and details of the presentations. However, an insignificant ratio of the participants in this study claims that PowerPoint does not bring positive effects in presentations in some cases. This finding is in line with what was reported by Son [18].

5. Implications

The findings from this study suggest that EFL teachers and students should apply technology as well as PowerPoint in group presentations to make both the contents and the forms of these activities more diverse and effective. To be more specific, it could be stated that in the context of university learning for ELT majors, there must be some provided guidelines about the forms, contents, and timing of PowerPoint group presentations and evaluation criteria at the beginning of the course. These guidelines will help ELT majors to know about what they should do to design high-quality PowerPoint group presentations, given the fact that most of the courses in ELT majors put much emphasis on group presentations. Thus, the

guidelines for using PowerPoint slides, for instance, their quantity, formats, or the use of animation, etc. would direct ELT majors' attention to design and use the software effectively.

One finding of the current study is the work division among the members to prepare the slides. The majority of the participants in this study claim that one member is in charge of creating the slideshow for the whole group, which indicates that those who have more skills in technology would work more. Thus, the assessment for group presentations should give a bonus point for the slideshow designers as it is obvious that the success of a presentation depends much on this kind of technical work.

It is also essential that classmates and teachers should give feedback on the contents and forms of PowerPoint group presentations at the end of the presentations. These comments and suggestions will help ELT majors promote their strengths as well as overcome limitations. Feedback on the use of PowerPoint in group presentations is a great opportunity for students to share and improve their knowledge and skills in technology application.

As PowerPoint is an artifact, understanding and knowing how to use it, as investigated in this study, would benefit users in the thinking process and the results of their presentations. The ELT majors in this research report to rely on the slides for making their points clear and attract the audiences' attention. This finding, though not new, indicates the necessity of strengthening the skills of using the artifact among language learners, as they need both the artifact and the skill to use it to facilitate their effective thinking, leading to successful group presentations.

6. Conclusion

This study is set out to explore two issues, namely students' perceptions and their use of PowerPoint in group presentations. Generally, ELT majors have positive attitudes toward the use of this multimedia tool. The students usually prepare slides individually, and the most skillful of them creates the slideshow for the group. During presentations, although ELT majors focus on the key points, most of them just read from the slides. However, they can take advantage of various archiving and display functions of PowerPoint. Overall, PowerPoint is a useful aid for ELT majors to meet the requirements of their frequent group work presentations.

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