

***Moodling English Presentation Skills: A Constructivist  
Instructional Design for Thai Adult Learners in Distance Education***

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**Abstract**

Beyond traditional undergraduates, Thai adult learners from diverse backgrounds in higher education lack a firm foundation in spoken English. The prevalent mode of distance learning limits the opportunities for utilizing life-experience and fostering presentation skills in English to the fullest possible extent, when compared to a face-to-face classroom. The Moodle platform has created a richer, collaborative learning experience by incorporating a powerful technology-based environment to their coursework with self-initiated topics. With a constructivist approach, learners refine necessary presentation skills from individual task assessments provided by instructors. This presentation focuses on the experiences and challenges of using e-learning in case-based teaching of the English language. Research methods included questionnaires and oral assessments from twenty-five senior English major undergraduates taking the “Effective Presentations in English” course at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University. Knowledge construction is encouraged through the two required assignments, which account for 40 percent of the course grade. The initial written formative assessment determines students' necessary skills prior to demonstrating a five-minute oral presentation video embedded on YouTube as the final assignment. The online activities will be presented to illustrate the application of the model from the e-learning activities. The study shows positive impacts on the students' language performance and speaking ability, as well as an enhanced enthusiasm for learning.

**Keywords:** adult learning, educational technology, online course, constructivism, English (foreign language), public speaking, distance education

## **Introduction**

Adult learners favor a specific type of online course to model presentation skills in English for their professional development. Technology-based courses have become an economically viable and convenient option and play a future role in distance learning. With the Moodle platform, English major learners deepen their understanding of English presentation skills and develop a high degree of interactivity through the course design. This presentation introduces the features of adult in learning presentation skills in English and constructivist design for e-learning will also be explored. Following this discussion, the organization of a constructivist design for learning English presentation skills will then be placed within the context of Thai adult learners. This study presents a framework of constructivism in distance learning courses with recommendations for designing an online environment to meet the needs of adult learners, relying on the concept of lifelong learning.

## **Related Literature**

### **Learning English presentation skills as adult learners**

Adult learners have unique needs and characteristics in the context of learning. Knowles (1989) stated that adult learners are capable of engaging themselves in self-directed learning. Compared to traditional university graduates, they are more independent, autonomous and self-reliant towards goals (Cercione, 2008). They also possess a variety of life and work experiences and new knowledge can be best learned when it is integrated into their real-life contexts (Huang, 2002). Adult learners present a constellation of learning processes with close application of their studies to their work, as learning presentation skills are essential in their future careers (Merriam, 2014).

Giving an oral presentation is one of the most preferable means to assess learners' oral communication skills in English language instruction, followed by responding to question orally, describing and reacting to visual prompts, and story-telling. The presentation features are sequenced openings and closings, introduction of new topics and topic shifts, and use of natural conversation (Khamkhien, 2010). Learning outcomes predicts what learners will gain as a result of learning. Thus, a clear relationship between learning outcomes and assessment should be identified. Scoring rubrics are commonly used for accessing learners' speaking performance regarding pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, content, fluency, and comprehension (Stevens & Levi, 2004).

However, it has been argued that the rubrics are more linguistic competencies oriented towards measuring rather than conversational competencies (Kormos,

1999). Assessing the overall oral English performance of the learners is outweighed as English language proficiency is not the sole requirement for making a good presentation. Effective presentation is on the condition that learners are comfortable and feel at ease, more importantly holding the audience's attention is the key factor. Although, some learners' exposure to English is relatively low outside the virtual classroom, non-native English speakers employ better strategies in preparing presentation. (Anderson, 2013)

English language learning in distance education is a major issue for adult learners. Non-traditional learners encounter complex psychological and English language learning barriers to complete higher education (Rose-Adams, 2013). Oral presentation skills are difficult to master even after years of study at the Thai university level for the following reasons:

**1) Lack of confidence.** Adult learners are prone to underestimate their ability to learn due to being away from systematic education (Hamp-Lyons, 1991). In addition, they face a new challenge of isolation and reduced interaction using asynchronous learning in a foreign language in comparison to the face-to-face classroom (Bouhnik & Marcus, 2006). Consequently, this lack of confidence prevents them from being engaged and fully developed their English skills in the delivery presentation of English in the academic context.

**2) Lack of motivation.** Carrying out individualistic and research-type work regarded as essential to their life skills is uncustomary. Thai learners are generally intolerant of the inflexibilities of independent study as they have adopted learning methods appropriate to the examination-based system (Bankowski, 2010). The approach of second language acquisition emphasizes the cognitive process both in the situational and inner process factors. English major courses are predominantly taught in English. Nevertheless, learners are unlikely to acquire the skills for critical thinking and deliver oral presentations successfully in English.

**3) Lack of vocabulary and understanding of intercultural communication.** Learning English as a second language is assumed to be systematic between knowing and using the language form. The variations of the communicative demand require different types of discourse in each task (Albert, 2011). Instructors generally use non-authentic and uninteractive speaking tasks to assess learners' communication abilities. It appears that learners are unable to present their ideas in their own original and creative ways in particular situations.

### **Constructivist theory and online learning instructional design**

Instructional course design practices have shifted from objectivism to constructivism. The behavioral principles cannot define the acquisition of high level skills whereas cognitive conceptions can influence ineffective abilities of learners. Constructivism is referred as "meaningful learning". The constructivist learning theory postulates that knowledge can be constructed individually and socially, re-constructing based on their interpretations of experiences in the world through collaboration and social

negotiation (Bonk & Cunningham, 2004; Bonk & Graham, 2014). Constructivism is a notion that the active role of learners is building understanding and making sense of the information, the knowledge occurs when the learning is tailored made for them.

Constructivism can be categorized in two folds: psychological and social views of knowledge construction. Piagetian constructivism is formed by transforming, organizing, reorganizing previous knowledge (Piaget, 1951). On the contrary, Vygotskyian constructivism is formulated through social interaction. Psychological constructivism provides opportunity to support and reflect in presenting content and practicing the English language (Vygotsky, 1987). Learners are actively involved in knowledge construction rather than mere passive learners. Providing more advanced media through the online course design, learners are capable of exploring richer information by audio and visual experiences. Through the online platform, learners notice the transmission of multiple verbal and non-verbal cues, natural language as well as the conveyance of emotions and feelings. Learning is constructed individually, based on participant's prior experience and collaborative contribution.

Social constructivism is characterized by online interaction and engagement in the course. This is on the condition that students are able to access the forum tasks. Thorpe (2008) stated that the course design facilitated a genuinely social constructivist pedagogy resulted in high levels of student satisfaction and engagement. Course interaction allows participants to develop successful learning communities. The prevalent English-medium curricula course design has generally failed to encompass the learning experiences of Thai students. When implanting the English language as a medium of online course instruction, it is essential to examine holistic understanding of learners and adapting curricula to the real world of local students (Dewey, 1938).

Online learning focuses on a communicative language approach and an engaging environment resulting in adequate practice of English speaking skills (Yoo & Huang, 2013). The Moodle application contains tools that support activities for collaborative environment. The instructors' roles are virtually providing assistance as well as feedback to learners' work regarding the developments of the participant's language skills, but also helping with the video recording, which enables learners to rehearse and make their presentations more cohesive.

The compromising approach is to investigate a way to enable instructors to facilitate learner-centered and authentic online interactions, as comprehensive activates are already embedded into module design and assessments. English major courses are predominantly taught in English. The course instructional design has been a move towards including forum and activities in online modules that contribute to formative and summative assessment (Yoders, 2014). Learners should possess the ability to acquire the skills for critical thinking and deliver oral presentations successfully.

A constructivist course design is not without challenge. Both self-directed and collaborative learning are required for learners to complete their learning activities

with online interaction. Lack of student engagement is problematic unless it is made compulsory (Kirkwood & Price, 2005). Considering the constructivist approach, learners have ownership of the learning process with minimum supervision, and take responsibility for their oral skills. As a result, learners may have overwhelming trouble taking responsibility for their own pace.

### **Pedagogical techniques in English language learning online**

Technology-based instructions have advanced the delivery method for open distance education. Learning speaking skills has been limited in course management system (Stephenson, 2001). The need for a unique structure with flexible features of an online course based on the implications is neglected. The researcher's belief was to create a rigid online course that learners are given rich and interactive academic oral skills in the English language. This would lead to development of more effective alternative of helping adult learners achieve their fullest possibility of learning. It is necessary that learners demonstrate oral presentations in an online learning environment, even though the instructors and learners are in different geographic locations. The instructional modules should be carefully designed to help prepare learners for the presentation in academic and professional settings. The details of the course are presented further in this paper.

### **Course design and implementation**

Adult learners prefer to be active participants in all phases of learning. Long (1986) alleged that the process of applying andragogical principles in entire programs encourages them to become self-directed, pro-active, and life-long learners. Individual learning activities establish a climate conducive to adult learning in the following criteria: an organizational structure for participative planning; the diagnosis of needs for learning; the formulation of directions of learning the development of a design of activities; the operation of the activities and the evaluation of needs for learning.

Incorporating new technology offers different responses to learning in colleges and universities. Moodle is a learning management system (LMS) that has a large learning curve for learners and instructors. The Moodle model curriculum has tremendously increased in popularity (Moore and Kearsley, 2012). This practical design is derived from a constructivist framework for learners to work through a typical step for presentation preparation. Successful learning is on the condition that the instructors select course activities that match with the course objectives. The instructional learning activities share common elements of involving learners to engage, think critically, express their ideas through writing, receive feedback and reflect upon the learning process (Eison, 2010).

The pattern of oral skills is fostered during the course with the direct input of the multimedia content provided, rather than showing that learners had acquired or mastered those skills at an earlier time. Topics were suitably narrowed since students were required to submit them for the instructor's approval before

preparing their presentations. Similarly, there was a requirement that students use references in preparing and presenting their assignments. Outlines including introductions, conclusions and other fundamental structures of their work are clearly given in the instructions.

With the increasing number of online courses, investigation of the activities that motivate adult learners continue to grow. Applying the constructivism approach through the Moodle platform provides a dynamic learning environment for learners by involving themselves in the presentation of the subject matter (Saba, 2008). The general guidance and study help guide them to make 5 minute presentation videos to show the understanding of the subject.

Poor instructional design fails to maintain learners' attention. The importance of employing learning strategies is to maximize their active learning. Adults should be able to scaffold their learning through interaction between learners and the instructors, and among the learners themselves (West et al, 2013). Scaffolding promotes self-reliance and greater performance of the activities that they were unable to perform. Language learners need to be exposed to the English language, communicate in the English language, negotiate meaning and testing rules and get feedback (Krashen, 1992).

Smith & Colby (2007) found that solely teaching materials and design of the online course limited students to surface learning. Learning environments designed around tasks promote deeper learning outcomes. Therefore, existing courses should be regularly revised to incorporate learning tasks that will result in deeper learning experiences. ☒

The course contents, objectives and course syllabus are provided at the beginning of the course. Each learner is required to create an individual access account, complete their profiles and discover different constituents of the course. During the course learners were going through the resources and activities to work on their own presentation topics with clearly defined goals and the use of electronic tools, while communicating with course mates. News and forums post the numerical results, show new discussion topics posted by students, as well as the number of participants.

Developing different task options helps learners understand the content by working on their difficulties and bypass them in language learning interaction. This inter-relational framework is in accordance with their potential activities and their interests. Learners are able to take part in enriching activities unlike habitual drilling practices. Moore (2013) stated that language acquisition is closely related with distance education and learning theories. Oral presentation skills are developed into academic discourses from a variety of activities:

### **1) Module activity (Inference)**

The different media elements are used in the course material integrating text, video audios and graphics. The sequence of the activities is implemented by

the logical connection of the content (Baralt et al. 2004). To visualize structures and concepts of presentation skills in English, participants were given numerous examples modelled by using mind map, course content, and external resource links to make a successful presentation.

### **2) Pretest and posttest ( Formal practice)**

The self-evaluation method can help develop critical thinking and the monitor process. Learners complete pretests and posttests in each module to check their understanding of the structured content in each module. These tests also can help learners evaluate themselves with the answer key.

### **3) Course assignment (Monitoring)**

Participants are able to maximize the study from 2 assignments and obtain feedback. Participants are required to write their presentation outlines and record a 5 minute YouTube presentations based on different topics. These help learners recognize the difference of English language used in written and spoken forms. Receiving explanation from elaborate feedback is positively associated with student achievement. Recording the video is advantageous, as the learners have the opportunity to repeat themselves and regulate their speech on the presentation. YouTube facilitates self-evaluation as they can record their speech, provide sound and dynamic visual which give learners the opportunity to make a meaningful connection to the English language and presentation content (Boonsai et al., 2010).

### **4) Discussion forum (Functional practice)**

The forum boards are provided to share ideas and promote collaborative discussion. Communication among course participants creates cooperation and handles conflict throughout the course.

## **Aims of the Study**

The aim of this study was to explore learning strategies from adult learners' use of oral skills that have occurred during their last year at university. The unique specific online course design was delivered to 25 English major participants as a part of their program requirement, and through questionnaires and feedback from instructors during the 2014 academic year. It was anticipated that that the results of this course would be evident in the effective oral skills that are necessary to perform the required tasks that are produced by the adult learners.

This study intends to address the following 2 research questions:

1. Do constructivist design and effective English presentation skills have a positive correlation in adult distance education?
2. What learning activities favor online adult learners from constructivist course design?

The compilation of recommendations for the design of the online learning environment for adult learners is based on the theories presented in this article. These theories provide a foundation for organizing current knowledge.

### **Study Settings and Participants**

This comprehensive study was conducted at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) in Nonthaburi. STOU has been the pioneer in distance education in Southeast Asia region since 1978. To provide a gateway to further education opportunities for working adults across Thailand, STOU has continuously evolved with transformations of distance education based on print technology, audio and video technologies, applications of telecommunications technologies, online delivery as the latest basis (Boyle, 1995; White, 2003). STOU has established 10 regional centers that are situated in major cities throughout Thailand to maximize access for the learners and to facilitate the teaching and learning processes.

The English program was founded in 2006. There are currently 14 online undergraduate courses in the School of Liberal Arts (SLA) offered by the English program. The program has a curriculum structured across 4 years with the online courses. The “Effective English Presentation” course on Moodle platform focuses on demonstrating oral English language skills at an intermediate level. In order to register for the course, a student is asked to pass the foundation English courses in the SLA. This course carries six credits with eighteen weeks per semester. The learners are provided with 15 self-study modules. The course requires participants to follow the course schedule consistently. The evaluation of the course is 40 percent from online assignments and 60 percent from the final examination, with a maximum of 100 percent available. Participants are required to obtain at least 60 percent to pass the course.

### **Methodology**

For the purpose of this study, an online survey questionnaire was developed for data collection. The methods employed to gather survey results were an email invitation along with an electronic-based survey. The list of email address was derived from the course user profiles. The questionnaire consisted of 6 parts: demographic information, syllabus design, online instructional activities, presentation outcomes and learning activities, and instructional design elements.

### **Findings**

To understand the case as a whole, this study relies on combining resources: questionnaires and feedback from instructors. Participants expressed their points of view of different aspects on the questionnaires: participants’ backgrounds, the presentation skills outcomes, and learning activities. The participants had to decide whether they agreed with the statements. The responses received are in rating scale of disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The data obtained in the questionnaires from 25 participants were transformed into tabular numerical data. Means and standard



deviations relating to each item were then calculated (Swian et al., 2011). Feedback from instructors was extracted from the participants' assignments. This made it possible to determine the perceptions of their oral skills from the course.

### Participants' background

According to the scaling method, the 25 undergraduate learners responded to the questionnaire. Out of those respondents 72% (18) are female, and 28% (7) are male. From the sample, the average age of 42% of the participants was 40-49 years old. The average time of study was 6-10 hours per week for 36% of the participants. The result indicated 36% spent less than 5 hours per week.

### Presentation skill outcomes

From the results, learners overwhelmingly indicted the constructivist design enhanced their oral presentation skills as shown in Table 1.

Topics	Mean
You are able to research the presenting topics and use references appropriately.	4.08
You are able to introduce a topic to the audience (using topic knowledge/linking/transition).	4.2
You are able to outline your ideas and grab attention (using written/spoken language).	4.08
You are able to stay focused at the presentation stage (using body language, eye contact, and voice).	3.84
You are able to construct visual aids and use them effectively.	3.92

**Table 1: Presentation outcomes (N=25)**

In this study, participants interacted through asynchronous modes; exploring various aspects of oral English skills from instructors' feedback. They appeared to link the subject matter of their talks, using questions, comments, and related information from their lives and their professions. However, their statements were sometimes irrelevant or only slightly connected to their main points made and sometimes contributed little to the purpose of their presentations. They were able to address their audience according to their outlines directly. Most learners seemed to be at ease and less reliant on their notes. They are capable of using their own words and, in contrast to the previous written assignments, the majority of them made a clear effort to involve the audiences throughout their talks by using questions and comments.

Considerable change was discovered in uses of presentation language and visual aids. The great majority of students used appropriate forms of visual aid, to support their outlines. Some learners simply used photographs related to the topics. In the YouTube video assignment, all of the students made better use of the visual aids, explaining them more fully and linking them more effectively in their presentations.

## Learning activities

Learners are satisfied with asynchronous interaction (time delayed online course) and reported a high level of social engagement. Based on the results, the assignment feedback is highly perceived as aiding to master their presentation skills followed by the discussion forum, pretest and posttest, and activity module. Concerning the key development of oral presentation skills in English, they feel their digital competency increased as shown in Table 2.

Activities	Mean
Discussion form	3.2
Assignment feedback	2.64
Pretest and posttest	2.12
Activity module	2.04

**Table 2: Rate learning benefits of the online activities (N=25)**

This study provided a positive virtual environment using technology-based environment. Participants are pleased with their time spent and work management. The participants acquired language skills from the course. Their progress was remarkable and positive for English language learning. However, some key aspects should be reinforced, for example, active discussions and linguistics competence.

The results indicated that learning became collaborative, rather than simply receiving of information. Collaboration with instructors and peers showed strong dynamic computer-mediated learning in conjunction with the delivery of the content. As online learning is conducted with individuals and has dependence of place and time, learners are able to make a progress on their oral presentation skills in English from their online experience.

## Discussions

### Constructivist approach

The primary consideration of instructors as they design online learning environments should be that each learner is unique. Understanding adult learning theories is also important, as it generates a dynamic learning environment. Saba (2012) posited that transactional distance varies throughout the learning process of the interaction between learners and the instructors as well as the interaction, and among learners. The instructor needs to be open with each student and respect each person as an individual who has experience that may be valuable to the virtual classroom.

The study results reported undergraduate constructivist instructional course design fulfills a skill-based English course. The course consists of an input (module activity and forum discussion) and opportunities for output (pretest, posttest and course assignment). Learners self-sufficiently work on their English presentation skills and know material well enough to communicate, rather than being dependent on instructors. Language acquisition and autonomy are supported as learners take advantage of English language learning from the reciprocal structure in an online learning environment (Andrede, 2014).

### **Presentation skills**

The results showed an increase in learners' overall presentation skills in the major areas of organization, content, and delivery. It can be seen that changes occurred through the working on written assignments over the semesters. The presentation contents were organized and well-prepared; in the same way learner were able to successfully link or integrate their outlines, introductions, and conclusions to the main content of their assignments.

Despite the course requirements, a small number of learners were unable to perform oral presentations across their assignments. It is possible that the difference in the types of topic selected in the outlines of their video presentations was a cause. A number of learners chose a more descriptive topic which was easier to formulate ideas and conclude their thoughts.

In the context of providing deeper learning environments, learning experiences were crucial for designing learning materials with real life experience in mind and situating them in authentic tasks. It was evident that the learners emphasized fluency rather than merely focusing on accuracy on YouTube presentations. Adults respond less readily to external sanctions for learning than to internal motivation (Knowles, 1989). Learning is concerned with engagement and communication. The paradigm changes in that learning is not just knowledge transfer, but rather skills development in authentic developments (Aksal et al., 2008).

### **Learning activity outcomes**

The primary consideration of instructors as they design online learning environments should be that each learner is unique. Understanding adult learning theories is also important, as is being able to change and accept change in a dynamic learning environment. Ellis (2003) stated that sequencing tasks that are suited to learners' development levels allows them to choose resources to arrive at their task outcomes. Online communities offer learners deeper learning opportunities, continuous monitoring, assessment of students' performance during their learning process, and provide feedback that impact the success of students' English language learning (Albert, 2011).

#### **1) Assignment Feedback**

Feedback includes information about one's learning from instructors. Providing feedback is considered to be one of the most effective strategies to promote student achievement (Wheatley, 2015). In online learning environments, students need validation of deeper learning from traditional methods of assessment. Individual formative feedback increases oral English skills

## **2) Discussion Forum**

Acquiring the new concepts from the course materials and obtaining different thoughts posted online are preferable. Learner discussion forums are the source of dialogue that provides opportunities for both rule-testing and meaning negotiating (Long, 1996). The constructivist designed course was found rich and helpful. The learners tended to meet their expectations on the flexible instructional design.

## **3) Module Activity**

Learners recognized their linguistic deficiencies of not having available language for the tasks required from subsequently using designed activities to successfully promote language development from the tasks (Fosnot, 2005).

## **4) Pretest and Posttest**

The degree of individuals applied skills were uniform, learners were able to work on sequencing activities provided in each module at just above their learning level without help. Having reasonable challenges and specific expectations of performance served as guide for designing the tasks. The constructive cognitive complexity of the same types of tasks promoted learners' abilities to learn and in automation of learners' linguistics resources (Baralt et al., 2004)

Learning activities facilitated a holistic learning experience by balancing between the flexibility available online in which information is accessed, processed, and shared that which is discussed in collaboration with peers. Asking questions result in problem solving, establishing relationships, and choice. Smith & Colby (2007) argued that learners who move beyond surface learning consider any given task as a series of internal rhetorical questions. Increasing meaningful dialogue occurs in environments in which participants are open to other people's views and acknowledge each other's roles and feelings.

## **Online course**

Thai adults have made the transition from conventional learning practices to Moodle-based tools that are used in the curriculum, which prepares and competitively positions the average learner for the future. The learner should be involved in the design process that supports any learning initiatives to meet the expectations of learners (Lowden et al, 2013). The online course strategy and guided, step-by-step, instruction play an important role in raising students' awareness of the individualistic learning process, which increases the confidence and ability to present

academic tasks. The nature of the tasks required in the course determines the success of the online program. Students must perceive the work as interesting, related and useful to their personal development, and relevant to their longer-term goals.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

This online course was designed as a pilot version and delivered in the Moodle learning environment for English majors at STOU. This study elaborates on the challenges of learning through technology in higher educational institutions in Thailand. The constructivist approach was examined in two sections: the relative presentation skills and the benefits of the activity. Each dimension constitutes a continuum along with learners' language skills achievements. The application of the framework illustrates positive development of oral presentation skills. The participants felt increasingly confident with their English presentations as non-native English speakers. The online learners appreciated the exchange of thoughts and cordial relations with other learners. The online activities must be emphasized for effective language learning. Learners' positive perceptions of this course are related to the sense of self-facilitation, whereas providing feedback on the assignments appears to be weak. Learners are expected to receive responses from both instructors and course members to encourage enthusiasm throughout the course.

It is evident that students' learning originated from different sources. The students' oral productions recorded digitally enable them to show their competencies and become aware of their own development. This systematic collection of evidence promotes learning and allows for different assessment procedures. The assessment criteria are clearly presented based on the submission of their written tasks.

### **Limitation and Future Directions**

The study was to explore the learners' presentation skills in English taught in the online environment. The findings of this study depict a better understanding of learning techniques in open distance education using the constructivism theory to ensure the success of the English course. There are a number of limitations in this study. The research was restricted to a relatively small sample of Thai adult learners. It was a specific sample of the English majors. The online environment may not be truly conducive to effective learning for English presentation courses under a constructive perspective. The benefits of using technology-based courses are not restricted to the area of English language acquisition. The constructivism design offers a theoretical lens into an innovative in educational approach. It is essential for instructors to investigate other effective avenues for teaching presentation online.

Another alternative is adoption of synchronous learning, where the instructors and learners can meet in real time. Moodle has turned passive courses into virtual learning spaces. With a special focus on strategies particularly in the virtual classroom, the more creative idea is to have learners give a presentations through

video conferencing and others could be presenting face-to-face to course mates. Versatility and flexibility in online courses are to be exploited as much as possible.

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