

The use of Power Point Presentations at in the Department of Foreign Language Education at Middle East Technical University

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Abstract

Power point Presentations are utilized by almost the whole faculty in the department of Foreign Language Education. This study was an attempt to examine the issue of the Power point presentation usage in the Department of Foreign Language Education (FLE) at Middle East Technical University (METU). It aims to investigate the attitudes of prospective teachers' towards the power point presentation usage from the perspective of teachers and students, as well as, the degree of correspondence between students' expectations and the motives underlying instructors' use.

For that purpose, interviews were held with 3 instructors who deliver lectures at the Department of Foreign Language Education, respectively, in literature, linguistics and English Language Teaching (ELT) methodology courses. The interview consists of three main topics which are as follows general ideas about the power point presentation usage, expectations as to the use of power point in FLE courses and problems related to using power point. To obtain quantitative data, questionnaires were administered to randomly-selected 35 students from the FLE department. The questionnaire has three sections: students' general views about the power point usage, their attitudes related to the faculty members' using power point presentations and their ideas about the instructors' encouragement for them to do power point presentation by themselves. In the first section, a bipolar scale, in the second and third section a five-point Likert scale was used. The fourth section included open ended questions and the last part included questions on student' profile.

The findings pointed out that both teachers and students have positive attitudes towards using power point presentations. Moreover, teachers reported that they use PowerPoint presentations in their courses because they regarded them as effective tools in terms of providing visual aids, which is helpful to draw students' attention. Even though the instructors indicated some problems with the power point use, they were observed to be competent in finding solutions to them. On the other hand, students pointed out that it was necessary for them to be encouraged to do power point presentations for their future profession life. The research findings can provide some guidelines for the teacher trainers in the process of training prospective teachers for the integration of power point into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses.

Key words: Power point presentations (ppt), visual aids, methodology courses, prospective teachers, perceptions of effective power point usage

Introduction

Technology era has an effect on today's youth in terms of supplying digital stimuli and change in their perceptions and thinking processes, which impacts how they learn. As the student demographics change, information technology has become the criteria for successful performance both in the area of school and in academic life. Therefore, it has created the need of integrating technology into the area of education. The Power point presentation (ppt) is one of the most popular tools in the use of technology in education. In addition, since the power point usage is increasing day by day in the ELT (English Language Teaching) world, its effectiveness is vital. The correspondence between teachers' aims and students' expectations while doing presentations is very crucial. Ppt is used for many different purposes in courses at FLE Department such as exemplifying, explanation and providing framework. This research focused on "Power Point Presentation Usage at FLE Department at METU". Fisher (2003) defines power point briefly as follows:

"PowerPoint is a type of presentation software that allows one to show colored text and images with simple animation and sound. PowerPoint is just one of many types of presentation software."

The easy access to ppt tool makes it more widespread in courses than any other tool in education. Moreover, it can be shared via e-mail or downloaded from and uploaded to online learning systems such as METU Online. Therefore, instructors mainly use ppt and they encourage FLE students by giving tasks to students so that they can increase their skills of preparing presentations.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the use of PowerPoint presentations in classes at the Department of Foreign Language Education at METU. It examines ppt usage in terms of its

effectiveness, where and how it is used, the relationship between teachers' and students' expectations as well as the requirements expected from teachers and students. This study specifically sets out to investigate the following issues:

- Students' attitudes towards ppt usage at METU, the FLE Department.
- How the instructors' use of power point presentations affects students' learning.
- Why teachers prefer using ppt at FLE Department.
- In which areas and how ppt should be used.
- Students' challenges and gains while preparing and presenting the ppt.
- The degree of awareness of the teachers' and students' in terms of technological developments.
- Potential problems related to the use of power point presentations and the solutions

Review of Literature

In the information age, there is a consensus that computer technology should be used in the field of education. Therefore, prospective teachers are supposed to both develop their computer literacy and apply their skills of using computer in the teaching-learning process productively. From that perspective, Jonassen (2000) points out that our attitudes towards computers have changed in years. When we look at the historical background of the usage of computer and information technologies in education, we see that there are three application styles: learning computers, learning from computers and learning with computers. During the process of learning with computers, the important elements of a successful lesson have begun to be discussed. Accordingly, Christine (1998) concludes in his study that the most significant element in the classroom is neither technology nor PowerPoint presentations but the good teacher. However, Akdağ and Tok (2004) come to the conclusion that the instruction enriched through the use of the power point presentation has a determinant role on students' success. Thus, they didn't take into consideration the weaknesses of the teacher while using ppt. The reason of the weaknesses is the inefficiency of technology education in teacher training. Correspondingly, Duran (as cited in Şahin, 2003) underlines that one of the aims of teacher-training programs is to help prospective teachers to grasp the idea that the use of technology is meaningful, accurate and necessary in their own profession. Moreover, Şahin (2003) indicates that there should be available technology laboratories in the faculties of education and in those laboratories teacher candidates should be given the opportunity to make up their own materials. As it is seen, there is a tendency to encourage ELT students to do PowerPoint presentations in lessons because, according to the Ohio State University (2004), ppt both strengthen the process of students' learning and increase the skills of analysis and synthesis. Students' preparing ppt helps them see how the lesson is organized and learn the logic behind the design. Nonetheless, Aşan, Betrus, et. al. (as cited in Cengizhan, 2011) state that the teacher candidates graduate without being well equipped enough to apply technology into their own lessons, which shows that there are shortcomings in terms of the usage of technology.

In conclusion, many studies have been conducted about the usage of ppt in education. Some studies give technology prominence, whereas others mention about the importance of the teacher's performance while using ppt. Moreover, the tendency to encourage prospective teachers to improve their skills of using ppt is examined by many researchers. In consideration of these present research studies, this study both investigates the correspondence of teachers' aims and students' expectations and contributes to find out possible solutions to the problems about usage of ppt in FLE classes at METU, the Department of Foreign Language Education.

Methodology

The interviews were conducted with 3 faculty members who give, respectively, linguistics, literature and ELT courses at the department of FLE, METU. In that way our qualitative data was collected. In addition, the questionnaires were distributed to 3rd year students at the FLE department for the quantitative data whose ages are between 19 and 22. As far as the data collection tools are concerned, we designed a questionnaire in order to use for quantitative data collection. We used likert, bipolar scales for different categories of our questionnaire and there are open ended questions in order to get students' personal thoughts. At the end of the questionnaire, students are asked to provide some information about themselves and their interest in computers. In addition, for the qualitative data collection, we carried out semi-structured interviews with the instructors at the department so that we could gain valuable insights into their opinions, experiences and attitudes towards ppt usage. We composed our interview with 'open format questions'. It is in semi-structured form. With the help of those questions, we could get detailed and well-rounded answers.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The present study explores the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of teachers' using PowerPoint Presentations on students' learning at the FLE Department?
2. How are the students' attitudes towards their PowerPoint Presentation usage in FLE courses?
3. Why do the teachers prefer using ppt in their FLE courses?
4. Do prospective teachers need to be encouraged to do PowerPoint presentations by their instructors?
5. What are the problems of preparing and presenting ppt from the perspective of teachers and students? What are the possible solutions to these problems?

This present study hypothesizes that if instructors teach a lesson with the help of ppt, the efficiency of the lesson increases. This is understandable because ppt can draw students' attention if teachers' level of awareness concerning the technological advances in the power point presentation usage is sufficient. Moreover, the encouragement of preservice teachers to use ppt in FLE Department has a contribution to apply the computer technology in their

future courses. Lastly, there may be problems related to preparing and presenting ppt in the FLE courses, therefore, some instructors may not prefer to use ppt whereas the others may. It is hypothesized that the reasons for such problems may be that PowerPoint Presentations are perceived as an extra burden on the instructors in terms of time and energy.

Data Analysis

For the analysis of the quantitative data, we used SPSS program which helps us to compute the descriptive statistics related to the quantitative data. Firstly, we entered the variables which are the participants, age, academic year, having computer, attitudes to ppt before taking FLE courses, taking computer training and questions.

We labeled the answers of participants and gave values to them. We made tables according to the categories that were formed by being taken into consideration the research questions. Those tables are constructed with the help of charts and frequency tables supplied by SPSS.

In the qualitative data analysis, we made the transcriptions of all the audio-taped interviews. Accordingly, we analyzed the data via the content analysis, composing the main codes and the sub-codes based on the interview data.

In addition, we created table which includes transcriptions in the left column and the related codes in the column right hand side so that we can analyze the data better.

Results, Discussion and Conclusion

It is essential to analyze whether the results of questionnaire and interviews are in line with our hypothesis and research questions. To begin with, concerning our first main question, why the teachers prefer using power points in their FLE courses, the overwhelming majority of the teachers in the study stated favorable views concerning the benefits of using power point presentations in class. It can be said that students (97.1%) also think they learn better if the course material is presented through some visual tools. Also, when we take into consideration that one of the reasons for the teachers' use of power point presentations was to provide visual aids, we can infer that both instructors and students were content with that feature of ppt. Besides, teachers and students find power points effective, which is most probably due to the fact that power point presentations enable image and insertion. In parallel with what EA, Interviewee 1, pointed out below:

"I think it helps them understand certain concepts better such as "sublime" for example. If I show them a picture representing that notion, it may help because it is a really abstract thing, so ppts are helpful in terms of concretizing abstract and difficult to understand concepts."

Teachers also believed that power points make the content more appealing; therefore, they help them to take students' attention. Correspondingly, students agreed that they draw their attention, which supported our hypothesis.

With the help of power points, teachers are likely to give a lesson in sequence, as CS, Interviewee 2, and EA stated, this contributes to the lessons' being organized, thereby giving students a chance to see the big picture. They can see the main and sub-categories together. Consequently, teachers don't spend extra time by writing everything on the board.

However, EA pointed out that preparing power point before the class adds a lot of extra burden on her shoulders as a teacher. It can be concluded that preparing ppt is demanding and using it during lesson is time and energy saving, which might have led teachers in the study to prefer using them.

To continue with the second and the third research questions which investigate the students' attitudes towards them, and the students' opinions about the power point usage, there can be two different points of views as to whether power point presentations or teachers are the dominant factor in students learning. Akdağ and Tok (2004) indicate that the instruction done with the support of power point presentation has a determinant role on students' success. Since 88.5% of the students reported that the usage of power point helps them better acquire and better understanding of the course material, we can infer that using ppt in FLE courses has a positive effect on their learning. However, only 31.4% of them reported having difficulty in focusing on the topic in the lessons in which the power point is not used. Therefore, during the lesson, learners should be provided with other tools as power point presentations are not best tools to convey the meaning. Accordingly, Christine (1998) concludes in his study that the most significant element in the classroom is neither technology nor the power point presentation but the good teacher. At this point, we can claim that a good teacher is the person who uses power point presentations interactively, which helps students to learn better since they prevent them from staying passive during the lesson. Similarly, 88.5% of student teachers in the study thought that a teacher should maintain a balance between the lecture and the slides. As far as the Department of Foreign Language Education (FLE) at METU, is concerned, prospective teachers in the study (60%) were of the opinion that their teachers do interactive power point presentations by asking them questions about each slide whereas 40% of students stated that they felt sleepy during lesson. By taking into consideration that assumption, it can be deduced that the instructors at the FLE department not, merely, concentrate on the slides and forget about interacting with the learners when they use power point presentations. For effective learning, it is inevitable for teachers to use power point presentations, but on condition that they integrate it into the lessons with the participation of students. To have a high level of computer skills can also be said to be a vital factor for that purpose. When we look at students' opinions about that issue, the majority of students believed that their course instructors had the computer skills necessary to prepare power point presentations effectively while only 5.8% disagreed with that statement.

The fourth question in the study addresses the students' ideas about the impact of the power point presentation usage. We sought to find out whether prospective teachers need to be encouraged to do power point presentations by their instructors. In response to this question, the interviewees, three instructors from the Department of FLE, expressed different views. One interviewee, the instructor who gives linguistics courses, said that she doesn't want students to do presentations in her courses. This may be due to the nature of the lesson since the purpose of it is to transfer information. On the other hand, the ELT instructor pointed out that she wants her students to develop their computer and public speaking skills by doing power point presentations. However, it is not necessary for students to do power points in literature courses according to EA. Hence, we can deduce that teachers' expectations tend to change according to the content of the lessons.

To continue with the students' expectations, the majority of students considered that it is essential for them to do power point presentations for their future profession. Accordingly, to develop their computer skills in their own lessons, they (82.9%) found the encouragement of FLE instructors to do power point presentations is suitable. They stated that they would use power points for the purposes of conveying meaning, attracting their students' attention and creating fruitful lessons. The following quotation constitutes a representative example of the teachers' ideas in this respect:

"Prospective teachers should be informed in ELT courses about how to prepare and perform power point presentation. They also need to practice doing ppts in order to be more competent. This also prevents possible technological and situational problems."

The fifth question of the research is about the problems of preparing and presenting ppt and possible solutions suggested by the interviewees. The teachers in the study pointed out that although power point presentations have many positive sides, they may sometimes cause problems. Most of the teachers stated that they had technological problems during the lectures. They enumerated problems such as the failure to access the internet server and a lack of projector connection. Those problems most probably arise from the fact that they have not been experienced enough to use technological facilities. On the contrary, students in the study reported to be mostly aware of the technological developments because only 1 student out of 35 remarked that s/he was not competent in using computer. This is an indication of the new generation's being more familiar with the technological devices and advances than instructors.

To those technological problems teachers in the study mentioned generating some solutions to the technological problems that they had. IK, Interviewee 3, said that if she gives a lecture in a computer lab, she sends power points to students' e-mail addresses beforehand in case of lack of projector connection. According to CS, Interviewee 1, checking the power points and the connection beforehand may help the teacher to prevent possible problems immediately. Even though EA did not report facing a power cut, she suggested that the printed form of power points should be distributed to the students on such an occasion.

Along with the technological problems, EA pointed out another issue that students may not need to take notes during lesson since they think ppts are enough for exams. As a solution, she added that she warns her students that they should pay attention to taking notes since she does not make the power point presentations available as lecture notes.

As a conclusion, power point presentations help teachers to draw students' attention during the lesson, which increases the effectiveness of learning process. In addition, student teachers' positive attitudes towards their instructors' encouragement to do power point presentations showed that students, as prospective teachers, are planning to use power points in their future profession life.

This study can be replicated with more participants to understand the power point presentation usage from a broader perspective. It is recommended for future researchers to investigate how to train pre-service teachers in the field of effective use of online tools in classes in order to achieve the integration of technology into foreign language courses.

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