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The Importance of Presentation Skills in Institutions of Higher Learning



Presentation skills are one of the essential skill sets for students in institutions of higher learning. To help them improve their presentation skills, students are encouraged to use systematic methods to facilitate their presentations in the classroom. The main purpose of emphasising presentation skills in higher education is to help develop professionalism in the learning environment. In this era of technological advancement, students can enhance their presentation skills using high-tech equipment, thus improving their ability to present information in a professional manner.

According to the Malaysia Job Street survey in 2015, employers are dissatisfied with the quality of fresh graduates in Malaysia. The poor ratings were not generally associated with their academic qualifications, but the poor attitude and communication skills shown during interviews or in the workplace.

Students find presenting in or outside the classroom during their studies very challenging. Many feel less confident when speaking in front of large groups. Presentations can be stressful and many students do

not enjoy them and feel nervous when asked to present.

To overcome these challenges, students need to be prepared. The following are four key elements to improving presentation skills among students.

1. English proficiency level: English is an important language at institutions of higher learning, particularly in countries where English is commonly used. Students should be aware that enhancing their presentation skills will also improve their competency in communication as well as their proficiency in English. Practising presentations in English will improve performance and at the same time help students master the language in order to communicate confidently. Being proficient in English is important because most jobs advertised require a good knowledge of English, and employers prefer their staff to be proficient in the language and be able write competently. Many international companies in Malaysia use English as their main language, even if the employers are from non-English speaking countries such as Germany, Hong Kong, India, Japan, South Korea, and Indonesia.
2. Create innovative ideas: Good presentation skills also help one come up with better ideas, find up-to-date information and develop creative thinking. It is common to see students using slides or other sources while presenting, making them feel comfortable in front of an audience. Presentation skills help create innovative ideas when students come up with creative and interesting slides to illustrate their talk. The use of presentation aids makes for a much more interesting talk, and the creation of such aids can help develop students' confidence. Students are usually given 10 to 15 minutes to present a specific topic in the classroom. Thus, the more talks they give, the more they will learn. As a result, their confidence level will improve. Active involvement in classroom presentations further prepares students for interviews, conferences, forums, workshops and debates.
3. Body language: Body language can be another effective communication tool. In order to attract the audience, the appropriate body language is important in every presentation. Students need to learn suitable skills and effective strategies to ensure the presentation is successful. Gestures and facial expressions help to communicate the students' feeling and emotions during their presentations. In addition, students who are actively involved in presentations are more prepared and positive when they attend meetings, conferences or interviews.
4. Be well organised: In order to prevent mistakes and technical errors, students must prepare well for a presentation with a proper outline and structure, as well as a good vocabulary and practising pronunciation and intonation.

One must be well organised in order to make the audience understand the purpose of the talk and keep them engaged from the beginning to the end of the presentation. Learning to put together a simple and well-organised presentation will give students confidence and help them be more successful in the future. Therefore, students must realise the importance of presentation skills before stepping into industrial training or a full-time job.

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