

**Haithem Cherfi & Dr. Saadoune Farida**  
**Optimising Linguistic Fluency: An Empirical Inquiry into the Integrative Efficiency of Universal Design for Learning in Increasing English Speaking Duration. The Case of First Year Bachelor Students in the University of El Oued, Algeria**

**Optimising Linguistic Fluency: An Empirical Inquiry into the Integrative Efficiency of Universal Design for Learning in Increasing English Speaking Duration. The Case of First Year Bachelor Students in the University of El Oued, Algeria**

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### ***Abstract***

This experimental study is concerned with the efficacy of Universal Design for Learning in extending English-speaking time in university, juxtaposed against the conventional classical method. The study design includes two groups, consisting of a case group exposed to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and a neutral group subjected to traditional teaching methods. A quantitative analysis of the collected data is undertaken utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings not only signify but also underscore a noteworthy escalation in the duration of English-speaking during presentations. This study contributes valuable insights into enhancing language learning experiences within university contexts, offering potential pedagogical advancements.

**Keywords:** Universal Design for Learning, classical method, English-speaking duration, presentation.

## **1. Introduction**

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has emerged as one of the modern teaching frameworks that are especially concerned with accommodating diverse learning environments and settings. This framework was the subject of this study to investigate the degree to which it can develop speaking skill when implemented as an instructional model. In contrast to the classical method, which relies heavily on repetitive use of presentation, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) remains an unexplored territory that may bring more fruitful results. This is especially important when the need for increasing academic yields in quantity and quality is not only always present but also

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desired. As such, the paper seeks answering two research questions:

How long can first year students speak for during an oral presentation?

How long is the period of time they can achieve using Universal Design for Learning (UDL)?

To answer these questions a hypothesis is suggested as follows:

- 1- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) makes contributes to increasing English-speaking time among first year university students of English.

To confirm the suggested hypothesis, two sub hypotheses are suggested as follows:

- 1.1- There are no statistically significant differences ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) between the pretest and the post-test in the neutral group with regards to English-speaking time among first year university students.

- 1.2- There are statistically significant differences ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) between the pretest and the post-test in the case group with regards to English-speaking time among first year university students.

- 1.3- There are statistically significant differences ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) between the case group and the neutral group in English-speaking time.

## **2. Study Background**

Speaking is the first productive skill that is utilised interactionally (Bygate, 1998, p. 23) to convey and exchange opinions, information, and emotions (Howarth, 2001). Speaking constitutes the primary and most frequently used medium of communication. In fact, speaking is twice more used in communication compared to reading and writing (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). As such, great

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care and consideration has been given to it regarding the pivotal role it plays in communication.

When it comes to English language, the importance is further accentuated by the position of English in the world as being the language most commonly used (Smith, 2015; Abilasha & Ilankumaran, 2018; Pavlyuk & Salisu, 2022). Efforts have been going at length and quality to foster the skill and give impetus to its development among university students and faculty. Reaching an elevated level of proficiency translates to preparing the academia to engage in the academic and scientific landscape on an international level, which expands horizons and creates nodes of contact and exchange that are exponentially wider and richer.

### **3. Literature Review**

In El Oued University, the academic performance of students of English who are newly enrolled is hindered by a double-pronged obstacle: the level of language used in courses is considerably higher than their levels; and the lack of opportunities to alter that situation. This creates a state of confusion that has often decreased students.

Save for infrequent and limited number of opportunities for participation within lectures and sessions, which are occurring at intervals, the main place for actively practicing speaking systematically has been, and for the majority of courses, in the form of presentations, which are predominantly and extensively used and recycled. Students are required to present on certain topics in front of their peers with the freedom to choose the topic often limited by a specific number of topical suggestions or random suggestions such as the case in exams.

Presentations have been proved once and again being an effective technique for developing speaking proficiency (Dekdouk, 2013; Brooks & Wilson, 2015; Tsang, 2017; Riadil, 2020; Akanda et al., 2022; Ati & Parmawati, 2022; Hong Tuyen, 2023). A presentation is a method for showcasing knowledge in front of an audience (Tsang, 2017). The significance of presentations is

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first related to continuing one's academic career. Undergraduates are expected to write a dissertation in partial fulfilment to their graduation and then present and defend it in front of a jury. In master's degree, the length of the presentation proportionally increases in accordance with the length of the dissertation made. In doctoral studies, Ph.D. students are required to attend no less than two conferences where they will present the sum of their research in front of experts in their respective field and finally defend their theses as well. Within the academic context, the importance of presentations is well-established and is one that cannot be dispensed with. Out of the academic context, presentations remain a highly valued tool in many other fields. In fact, preparing a professional presentation is considered one of the most important and required 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that fall within the umbrella of communication.

When this is put to the test, university students' study six months a year when holidays and exams periods are subtracted (notwithstanding absences made by teachers). The sum of hourly amount rises to a maximum of thirty-six hours per academic year. Of note, one student would not have the opportunity to present more than three or four times a year, which corresponds to about fifteen minutes of speaking time, excluding post-presentation discussions. This is primarily due the substantial number of students that makes it hard to allocate enough time for each and every student to make enough presentations until there is a significant increase in their competence that aligns with the level expected of them. Additionally, it juxtaposes with an expected dropping rate in discussions. When students are free, more likely than not will they go the path of least resistance, meaning a lot of them would not choose to participate on their own accord for a number of reasons that include being introverted, tired, uninterested, shy, socially awkward, having a low self-esteem, not wanting to be at centre of the spotlight, or simply for not liking the module altogether. Moreover, there are other technical problems that make presentations a bad choice within the Algerian context. Having a considerable number of students aside, presentations are not suitable for

correcting pronunciation as they would either interrupt the presenter, which is evidently unviable for lacking a reference in the first place; or having a collection of corrections at the end of the presentation where the feedback may be too dense to prove useful. Speaking and pronunciation are two different things and targeting the latter can only be successfully achieved when speaking is dealt with. Therefore, it is probable that it can induce a decrease in motivation instead as has been previously proved in the context of El Oued University (Zellouma, 2019, p. 230).

#### **4. Objectives of the Study**

Given the current situation of oral expression module being the main method for teaching speaking and linguistic competence in that respect, it is imperative to find a method that would garner the respective productive skill more efficiently, resulting in better yields that are concrete, significant, and universal. This paper gives priority to time. The motif for that being if students are able to speak for a considerable period of time in their first year at university, they will be able to work on quality of their spoken language as well as have higher confidence in their ability, which will translate to increased motivation and performance later on. This naturally means that a new model must be adopted. To that end, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is implemented. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework scaffolds through three stages of the lesson plan, namely presentation, guided practice, and free production, an aspect that is completely absent in presentations, which in turn will prove useful in reaching the objectives mentioned above.

#### **5. Research Methodology and Design**

The research conducted uses an experimental design to assess the impact of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) on enhancing of English-speaking time among first-year university students enrolled in the Department of English within the Faculty of Arts and Languages. The primary objective of this investigation is to meticulously gauge the disparities between the use of Universal

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Design for Learning (UDL) and conventional teaching methods in terms of increasing English-speaking time, aligning with the pursuit of precision in educational research (Kittur, 2023).

To facilitate a comprehensive comparison, a cohort comprising two distinct groups was assembled, and the ensuing data collection process aimed to gather pertinent information for subsequent analysis. Given that the duration of English-speaking time constitutes the central focus, it becomes imperative to engage in a quantitative evaluation as time is an inherently measurable construct. This approach not only ensures precision in the assessment but is also more practical, particularly when dealing with a substantial number of participants. Using a comparative framework, the research seeks to contribute more insights into the efficacy of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in fostering English language proficiency among university students, thereby addressing a critical aspect of language education in contrast to what is currently being practiced.

The study sample comprises 128 first-year students of English for the academic year 2022/2023. The large size has been chosen to detect the true effect of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as well as increasing the statistical accuracy of the study. Additionally, higher validity is achieved by encompassing a true representative sample that a broader population offers as well as reducing bias.

The cohort was divided into two groups: case and neutral with each group including 64 students. Each group had its own teacher. The case group was the one concerned with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework while the neutral group was taught using the classical method depending on presentations and post-presentation discussions.

Data was collected solely based on meticulous observation. First, both groups passed a pretest in the form of a presentation. Scores were recorded in seconds, corresponding to the duration of their respective presentations. By the end of the academic year, a post-test was conducted to

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measure the difference made within each group, respectively, and also between the two groups throughout the year. The data was later coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Additionally, Two-Sample t-Test was used in addition to Cohen's equation.

**6. Results**

To prove the validity of the two sub hypotheses, a Two Sample t-Test was conducted.

Time	M		M	S	T value	P-value	S S	IF
	Pretest	Post-test						
Neutral group n =64	106.66	116.95	10.29	17.64	4.66	0.000	Sig	0.17 (weak)
Case group n =64	132.98	270.22	137.23	89.16	12.31	0.000	Sig	189 (remarkable)

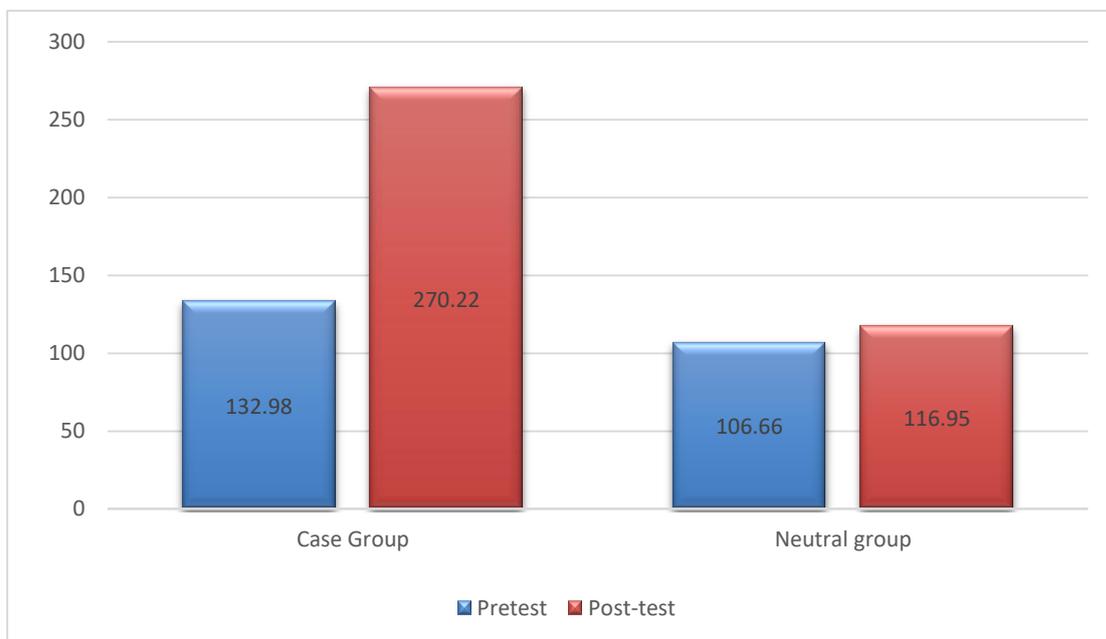
**Table 1:** Significance of the mean differences between pretest and post-test of the English-speaking time.

Table 1 demonstrates that mean difference in the English-speaking time between the pretest and the post-test in the neutral group has reached 10,29. The standard deviation was 17.64 while the t-test value scored 4.66. The p-value was 0.000 which is smaller than the significance range ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ). It also displays a mean difference in English-speaking time between the pretest and the post-test in the case group reaching 137.23. The standard deviation was 89.16. The t-test scored 12.31 while the p-value was 0.000 which is smaller than the significance range ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ). This indicates a divergence in the English-speaking time, which leads to refuting the first sub hypothesis and proving the second sub hypothesis.

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Cohen's equation was used to evaluate the effect of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in increasing English-speaking time as an indicator to the impact factor in the Two-Sample t-Test using Cohen's d that is weak at the value [0.20 - 0.50[, medium at the value [0.50 - 0.80[ and strong at the value [0.80 - more].

The standard value extracted from Cohen's d indicates that the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) score for increasing English-speaking time was 1.89, proving a substantial impact with the case group, which also proves the second sub hypothesis.



**Figure 1:** graphical comparison between the pretest and the post-test of the case group and the neutral group.

Figure 1 clearly demonstrates that the average English-speaking time of the neutral group in the pretest was 106.66 while the average duration increased to 116.95 in the post-test, which is increase of 9.64%. On the other hand, the average duration of the pretest for the case group is 132.98 while the average duration in the post-test is 270.22, which is an increase of 103.3% in the English-speaking time. This is attributed to the use Universal Design for Learning (UDL) with the

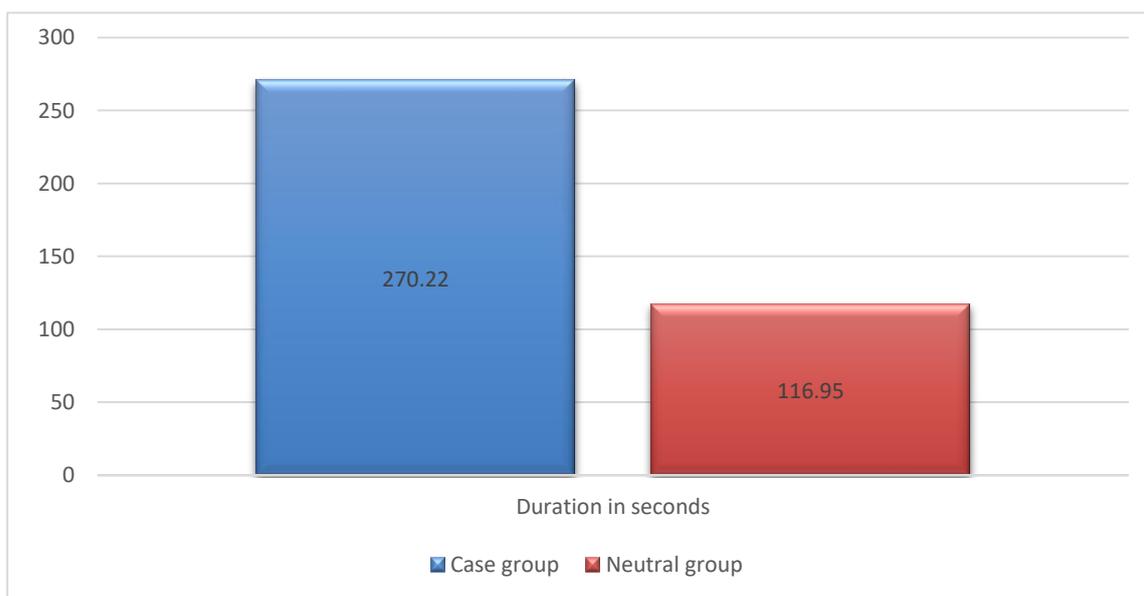
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case group during the study period. This requires proving the third sub hypothesis. To prove the third sub hypothesis, a Two-Sample t-Test was conducted with the results as follows:

English-speaking time (seconds)	n	Mean	S D	M D	T value	P-Value	S S	I F
Case	64	270.22	62.85	153.26	14.20	0.000	Sig	2.51 (remarkable)
Neutral	64	116.95	59.20					

**Table 2:** the significance of differences in English-speaking time between the average between the case group and the neutral group.

Table 2 demonstrates the average English-speaking time for the case group as 270.22 with a standard deviation of 62.85. In contrast, the neutral group scored an average English-speaking time of 116.95 with a standard deviation of 59.20. The t-Test value was 14.20 and the p-value was 0.000 which is smaller than ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ). This explains the difference between the case group and the neutral group in terms of the English-speaking time.



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**Figure 2:** graphical comparison between the case group and the neutral group in terms of English-speaking time.

Figure two shows that the average duration for English-speaking time for the case group is 270.22 which is evidently more than the neutral group which is measured at 116.95. Such difference is attributed to the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) with the case group.

As such, the hypothesis which states that the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) increases the English-speaking time among university students is therefore confirmed.

## **7. Discussion**

The study clearly shows that using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) had a significant impact on increasing English speaking time as opposed to using the classical method. The difference was marked between the case group and the neutral group, but also within the groups themselves. Moreover, it is evident that the improvement made in each respective group was remarkably different. The empirical support provided by quantitative data. Furthermore, the framework successfully accommodates a wide range of different student profiles, proving its main purpose. The large number of the sample studied double functions for generalisability. While the classical method is more commonly used, and therefore more familiar and easily implemented, it has been proved in this paper that it might not be the most suitable way for developing the speaking skill, especially for such a demanding objective such as delivering academic presentations with reliable performance.

## **8. Conclusion**

The classical method of oral expression teaching has always relied on presentations and post-presentation discussions. In principle, doing the same thing repeatedly would result in better

performance with regards to the conducted activity. Conversely, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) relied on a series of smaller speaking activities scaffolding carefully. Counterintuitively, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) showed better results. That is why it is recommended to be used during oral expression module.

## 9. Limitations of the study

The study was concerned with English-speaking time. When it came to exam results, students' scores were proportionate to the data mentioned herein. This leaves the opportunity to research the impact on the other factors of presentation. Such factors may include body language and eye contact, which are although not verbal, they remain important indicator for performance of the students.

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