



PECHA KUCHA- AN INNOVATIVE TASK FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

English classroom these days is no longer just about teaching and transferring knowledge to students but creating situations to make students involve and acquire the nuances of language. The most challenging task for today's English teacher is to search or design activities that promote communication. Adapting Pecha Kucha as a classroom activity is part of the exploration to meet such challenges. Pecha Kucha is a concise and an engaging presentation format which can address some of the issues that crop up in traditional presentations formats. Pecha Kucha is adapted by many language teachers across the world as a creative classroom activity. This paper attempts to present the possibility of adapting Pecha Kucha as a classroom activity for engineering students, explain its advantages and its limitations.

Key Words: Innovative Presentation format, ideal for Engineering students, creative and an engaging classroom activity,

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INTRODUCTION

Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn- Benjamin Franklin

It's a proven fact that English should be taught and learnt as a skill rather than as a subject. For this skill to be acquired with competence class room activities that involve students should be part of their curriculum. If one analyzes the reasons behind the lack of communicative competence in students, one of the major fears related to communication skills one can identify is the inability to face audience and express their thoughts confidently in English Language. This fear factor dominates their zeal to communicate. Facing audience and expressing his/her ideas poses an insurmountable task to a struggling engineering graduate. However, as part of their four year engineering program and further in their career, presentations are crucial to them. Hence, exposing them to the format of

technical presentations is mandatory and indeed highly beneficial to them.

Fortunately, the existing lab syllabus in many engineering colleges provide speaking platforms to the students to communicate in English. One such speaking platform is power point presentation. This tool is quite interesting and useful to the students. It gives a wonderful opportunity to the students to select a topic, gather information, design slides, prepare bullet points and finally present it in front of their classmates. However, in a typical English classroom it has been often observed that when students try to select and present a topic in traditional presentation format either as part of their assessment or activity there are certain drawbacks: Some students would be able to completely justify the task by utilizing the opportunity to its maximum whereas many would turn it into a mere routine of reading from the slides. The ultimate point of assigning presentations as an

activity is to enable students face audience and help shed their inhibitions. This goal is unfortunately compromised as students prefer facing slides rather than audience. The activity gets completed without realizing the main goal that is to reduce the inhibitions in the students.

As part of analyzing the reasons to why students hesitate to face audience, several students were asked to narrate their experiences with traditional format of presentation. Many came up with the standard replies such as lack of practice, lack of confidence, peer pressure, stage fear etc. as their reasons for not facing audience. Surprisingly, lesser known reasons surfaced too. Some shared their experiences stating that the reason they were looking at the slides was more of a behavioral compulsion than fear to face audience. They confessed that as the information to be presented was in points on the slides they felt more comfortable looking at them. They could not help but read them out to the audience. The activity did not necessitate a challenge for them to convey the topic in their own words and narrate it to the audience.

Added to this, some felt that the topics asked to select were from technical background. The reason teachers insist technical topics was because they think it would gear them for real time presentations in college. However, teachers miss a step. Before making them to present on technical topics one should make them narrate/ describe any topic of their choice. This would be a kind of ice breaking session and most importantly- narration is the first step to presentation. These two important reasons are enough to explore for an alternative activity to power point presentations for students.

Technology and communication skills are strongly connected today and internet became one of the teaching resources. Google search provides ample opportunities to surf, search and explore various activities and there are many helpful websites on various interesting presentation formats such as ignite, lightning Talk, Pechakucha. (Pronounced as /,petʃə 'kʊtʃə/) Speed geeking etc. Based on the two requirements: an activity which compels students to face audience and an activity that will give the opportunity to the students to

narrate or describe. Pechakucha seems to match the requirements. Pechakucha is the Japanese term for "the sound of conversation" or "chit chat". The very word chit chat triggered many teachers' curiosity to know more about this presentation format and implement it as an engaging classroom activity. Pecha Kucha is an appealing format dispelling the image of a typical bored and disengaged classroom presentation where text heavy slides dominate a student's presence.

What is PechaKucha

To define PechaKucha 20*20, it is a simple presentation format where you show 20 images, each for 20 seconds. The images advance automatically and you talk along to the images. The presentation format was devised by Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham of Klein Dytham architecture. The first PechaKucha Night was held in Tokyo in their gallery/lounge/bar/club/creative kitchen, SuperDeluxe, in February, 2003. Klein Dytham architecture still organize and support the global PechaKucha Night network and organize PechaKucha Night Tokyo. PechaKucha Nights are informal and fun gatherings where creative people get together and share their ideas, works, thoughts, holiday snaps -- just about anything, really -- in the PechaKucha 20x20 format. PechaKucha is the perfect platform to show and share your work (<http://www.pechakucha.org/faq>)

There are many websites that provide information on what is pecha Kucha format and Pecha Kucha nights. To name a few:

<http://www.pechakucha.org/>

<https://avoision.com/pechakucha>

<http://tlit.cofc.edu/2012/10/25/pecha-kucha-in-the-classroom/>

www.usc.edu/.../CMMR/Pecha_Kucha_TipsResourcesExample..

www.pechakucha.org/presentations/how-to-create

www.tes.com/us/teacher-lessons/introducing-pecha

The reasons why teachers are interested in adapting Pecha Kucha as a classroom activity are:

1. This format creates interest among the students as it is something different to their stereotyped presentation format.

2. The students can select any topic of their choice and the presentation should justify the reason for their interest in the topic.
3. In this format 20 slides are set to auto-advance every 20 seconds: so each student gets exactly 6 minutes 40 sec, the right amount of time to justify one's topic.
4. The format paves way to the need for preciseness of a presentation. One of the major problems with student's presentations is long winding sentences. In this format, the time constraint acts as a stimulator to the students to pace with the images.
5. The format creates a wonderful opportunity for the students to showcase their creativity and a unique way to improve their story telling and conversational skills.
6. The format is informal and helps to reduce inhibitions in the students. A crucial factor that helps students to shed their stage fear.
7. The format sustains the interest created in the listeners as each presentation is short and not tedious. Further it helps in holding the audience attention.
8. "Images over Text" is one of the key factors of this format. As the slides are restricted to one image per slide, the student should rely on his/her memory and storytelling technique.
9. The format requires avoidance of slide transitions and this saves lot of time. Completing the presentation within the given time is crucial in this format.
10. Audios and videos generally enhance any presentation. However, one should be able to select any audio or video that can fit into the 20 second time frame. Hence, avoiding any lengthy audios or videos is advisable.
11. The format will force the students to practice more as they cannot depend on the text heavy slides during presentations.
12. This creates an ample opportunity for the listeners to analyze the pictures and develop their critical thinking. Traditional formats of presentation does not leave

much scope for analytical thinking as everything is explained in the form of points.

Above all, the novel and intriguing way of presenting a topic adds a fun element to it that students cannot resist.

Pecha Kucha a classroom activity across the world

Pecha Kucha as a presentation format has been known for a decade and has been used at universities in Australia as the preferred presentation style in Masters Programs. It has also been used as a presentation format since the 2008 Australian Market and Social Research Society Annual Conference (Sunderland, 2008).

In 2008 the National Environmental Health Association introduced Learning Laboratory sessions at its annual conference which included Pecha Kucha sessions; a survey of attendees reported that Pecha Kucha was considered as "a novel way of using PowerPoint in presentations" and was voted as a favorite session (NEHA, 2008).

"I think of Pecha Kucha presentations as "lean forward," more interactive performances. For me, Pecha Kucha is about "riffing" on ideas, sharing one's thoughts on a topic, and trying to get certain ideas to "spark" for the listener" - Richard L. Edwards in his blog on Pecha Kucha in the classroom: Tips and strategies for better presentations.

Jennifer Welsh in History has used pecha Kucha with her students and here's what she says:

"It was a very interesting experiment (for me, at least; not sure how the students felt), and one I'd like to do again using what I learned the first time. I think that next time, I would watch some examples with the students in class, and talk more about the structure of a Pecha Kucha-style presentation, as well as what makes a good (or bad) PowerPoint slide. The main problem students had was putting all their text onto their slides and then trying to just read everything on there. That doesn't work with the format, since Pecha Kucha doesn't spend that much time on each slide. The best students were very engaging, and extremely creative in their work, incorporating interesting maps and images, and working well with minimal notes."

"Simply an amazing project that I believe has changed both classroom practice and student knowledge for years to come."- Jeff Utecht on student presentations in pecha Kucha 20*20 format in his blog Learning Through Presentations.

"The Pecha Kucha timing constraint and images, rather than excessive verbiage, maintain interest and gets the point across. The Pecha Kucha format provides better PowerPoint presentations. Pecha Kucha is a barroom innovation that has impacted the educational classroom".-Harvey C. Foyle, Marcus D. Childress Emporia State University (Pecha Kucha for Better PowerPoint Presentations, National Social Science Association Journal)

My experience with Pecha Kucha: Implementing Pecha Kucha as a classroom activity

Armed with the theoretical knowledge gathered online and with the zeal to implement a novel and beneficial task in my classroom, I attempted Pecha Kucha presentations in the communication skills lab for first year Engineering students. The lab strength is of 30 students and for them to get an idea about this new format I have given them a demo on Pecha Kucha format in the lab. After the demo, when I have announced in the class that they have to present their topic (as part of their internal assessment) in pecha Kucha format I got a mixed response from the students. Some of them were highly impressed with the new idea and were enthusiastic to try this novel and challenging format. However, there were quite a few students who were hesitant to experiment and were afraid that this would affect their marks. A quick inspiring talk on the advantages of giving a presentation in this format and how it would help them in improving their presentation skills reduced their fears to some extent. I have given them 2 weeks' time to select a topic, design slides with images and to prepare on the topic.

Unlike my previous projects I did not insist on technical topics but gave them complete freedom to explore their areas of interest. The reason being: I believe that too many constraints will drive away their curiosity and creativity. My only condition was that the audience should be able to learn something from these presentations. I was bombarded with several queries until the day

assigned for pecha Kucha session arrived. The pecha Kucha sessions have started amidst a mixture of excitement and trepidation. The topics ranged from informative aspects of technology to societal problems to amazing facts of world. To state few: Solar Energy, 21st Century Technology, Incredible India, Child Labor, Female Feticide, Wonders of World, The most haunted places across the world,

30% of students came well prepared and delivered the topic with assurance. The topic selection showed their interest towards the project and zeal to give their best. 40% of student's presentations were mediocre where students faltered yet continued. The remaining 30% made a poor impression because of their inept choice of topic, lack of practice and most evidently lack of interest. As a teacher what I have observed is the difference in the response between the regular power point presentation and Pecha Kucha. Though there were initial hiccups and setbacks, Pecha Kucha generated more interest through its unusual format. It definitely increased the student's level of practice as there was no chance of relying on slides. Some students couldn't resist their habitual glances at the slides but as there were only images they were forced to face the audience again. The much required art of storytelling was improved in many students. Some struggled with the conversational style of presentation but succeeded to some extent. The designing of slides provided another opportunity to showcase their talent as future techies. Many have designed interesting slides and the Image only condition challenged their creativity.

Students did not include any audio or video clips as it was their first attempt with Pecha Kucha and were not sure how it would merge with their presentations. The most interesting factor noticed by me was the tremendous increase in the attention paid by the rest of the students once the Pecha Kucha presentations have started. Students were keen to listen to the presentations narrated with the help of images rather than the text heavy robotic presentations they were used to.

However, there are certain things that need to be paid more attention to avoid certain drawbacks and they are:

- 20*20 slides give more scope but a typical engineering lab class is usually not more than 2 hours 30 minutes session. Completing an entire Pecha Kucha session in one given Lab slot is not possible. More ever 20* 20 slides needs 6 minutes 40 seconds time and if questions added another 1 or 2 minutes which requires total 8 minutes. So either the presentations need to be planned for 2 lab sessions or the format can be changed to 20*15 formats. (15 slides / each slide for 20 sec)
- Another complaint from 20% of students was that there was pressure to finish each slide within 20 sec, as they were timed to automatically advance, it created anxiety and tension in them. Some students were not able to perform satisfactorily because of this.
- As the students were still in their Engineering first year semester 1 , their technical knowledge was not up to the mark and designing Pecha Kucha slides with timer needs more sound technical knowledge. Some students had to struggle a lot. They also opined that this kind of project needs more preparatory time and 2 weeks' time was not enough.
- There was mixed response for freedom in choice of topic, where 60 % of students felt it gave them more scope to explore their interest and was stimulating there were 40 % of students who felt pre assigned topic would have been clearer and less confusing. Such students depended on stereotype topics rather than exploring on their own.

Assessment Rubric for Pecha Kucha

The evaluation process of Pecha Kucha can be similar to regular in-class presentations assessment where certain factors are listed and observed. The presentations can be graded using the following criteria:

Reg. Number	Organization	Content	Body Language	Use of Language	Presentation style

In addition to the criteria mentioned in the above table creativity, time management, and

confidence levels shown by the participant, etc. also should be considered while evaluating a student.

Student opinions:

- It's a great experience to present our views only in the form of pictures. It helps us to improve time management involvement, overcome stage fear and improve communication skills. - (N.SushmaSwaraj I/IV B.Tech Mechanical Engineering)*
- A new innovative activity for us. A nice interactive platform. All over it was excellent to be a part of "pecha Kucha". Students learn the value of time management in this activity .- (M.S.Amir khan, I/IV B.Tech Mechanical Engineering)*
- Having only images in presentation can improve presenting skills. Picture presentation makes everyone to prepare well so that they can present effectively. I personally feel thatpechakucha is better than traditional presentations. - (G.Rajesh, I/IV B.Tech Mechanical Engineering)*
- This presentation helps us to recollect all the matter while presenting because there was no information on the slides. It improves our memory power as we need to remember a lot of thing to present. It's a nice experience and is interesting. -(G.Kavya, I/IV B.Tech Mechanical Engineering)*
- It is interesting but I felt we should be given more preparation time. Two weeks' time is not sufficient as the presentation format is totally new- (P. Satish, I/IV B.Tech Mechanical Engineering)*

Conclusion

Undoubtedly majority of students preferred Pecha Kucha to the traditional formats. PechaKucha definitely helps in improving student's confidence levels for future presentations. It's comparatively interesting, concise, faster paced and most importantly helps students reduce their over dependence on bullet filled slides. However, these kind of presentations are more suitable for 2nd or 3rd year Engineering students rather than 1st year as students need to be more mature and tech savvy to handle this kind of format. What could be an

intermittent solution is to frame an activity similar to Pecha Kucha with no time constraint (An activity where a topic that can be explained by the students to the audience only with images) can be designed for 1st year students. This would give them a general idea of Pecha Kucha presentation and the actual format can be implemented by the students during their technical presentations in 2nd and 3rd years.

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