

# EDUCATIONAL MINI-VIDEOS AS TEACHING AND LEARNING TOOLS FOR IMPROVING ORAL COMPETENCE IN EFL/ESL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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## **Abstract**

The use of digital video has gained a prominent position in enhancing not only aural reception but also active production skills in the language classroom. The present paper seeks to share a set of three lessons plans based on the use of educational mini-videos that enhance the development of students' oral skills through an active learning methodology. Though implemented as a part of the ESP undergraduate course for engineering students at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM), these lesson plans can be easily adapted to other ESP/EFL/ESL situations. We aim at encouraging language teachers to use innovative ways to integrate educational videos into their teaching practice around the globe.

**Keywords:** educational mini-videos; oral competence; ESP/EFL/ESL; Higher Education

## **1. Introduction**

Today's global and plurilingual society demands a new profile of an engineer capable of collaborating in international and interdisciplinary working groups using English as a lingua franca. Future engineers need to acquire communication skills, such as speaking in public adjusting the discourse to the audience and the purpose of the interaction, be it strictly informative or promotional. These skills are crucial not only for students' academic and professional progress but also for building interpersonal relationships and fostering self-esteem in a world of work subject to permanently evolving demands.

Higher education institutions with a commitment to internationalization should focus on developing communication skills. However, educational programmes frequently relegate these skills to the second place (Mercer, Ahmed, & Warwick, 2014). Specifically, the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM) offers *English for Professional and Academic Communication* as a compulsory subject on almost all of the university degree courses. However, the shortage of specific resources for developing oral communication skills in the field of technical English is evident and the classroom time allotted for speaking activities hardly suits the students' needs

(Bobkina, Domínguez Romero & Gómez-Ortiz, 2019). Besides, traditional lecture formats continue dominating the class even though the students often show a decreased tolerance for lecture-based classes, particularly at a time when the Internet facilitates flexible access to audio and video resources on almost any subject (Butt, 2014).

Against this backdrop, the implementation of alternative pedagogies based on learning information and communication tools is a pressing challenge in higher education institutions like the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM) (Bobkina & Domínguez Romero, 2018; Matsushita, 2018; Prensky, 2012; Scott, 2015). On this basis, the present paper aims at sharing a set of three lesson plans based on an active learning methodology aimed at enhancing our ESP university students' oral skills through the use of educational mini-videos. Implemented successfully in the UPM context, these lesson plans have the potential of being adapted to other ESP/EFL/ESL situations, as a support for language teachers looking for new ways to integrate educational videos into their teaching practice across the world.

## **2. Educational mini-videos. Interoperable and reusable learning objects**

Since their inception in the 1980s, videos have been recognized as valuable educational tools because of their multiple advantages. Most of the methodologies of that time encouraged teachers to incorporate video materials into their language courses (Allan, 1985; Cooper, Lavery & Rinvoluceri, 1991; Lonergan, 1984). Nevertheless, videos did not gain a prominent position until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with a shift from its passive use, aimed at enhancing oral reception skills, to a more effective use focused on the acquisition of oracy skills (Dal, 2010; Domínguez Romero & Bobkina, 2017; Goldstein & Driver, 2015). This shift has led to a complete redesign of the language courses "...changing instructor practices and adapting organizational policies and allocation of time and space to align with more personalized instruction" (Means, Peters, & Zheng, 2014, p. 48).

The pedagogical potential of videos is closely related to the design of educational videos that are subject to the philosophy of Reusable Learning Objects (RLOs) because the combination of modern audiovisual technologies and ICT enables the production of excellent pedagogical materials that satisfy the characteristics of RLO. Introduced in 1992 by Wayne Hodgins, RLOs have been a focus of debate for the educational community ever since, omnipresent in almost any teaching proposal or initiative regarding e- or b-learning educational practices (Casar & Herradón, 2011). Defined as "digital resources that can be reused to facilitate learning" (Wiley, 2000), these learning resources include images, videos, audios and web applications to promote different learning experiences.

Within educational videos, educational mini-videos are short videos accompanied by user guides assuring learners' autonomous practice. In this context, educational mini-videos can be described as educational units and learning objects that stand out for being: 1) reusable, given the fact that they can be used in different contexts; 2) interoperable, as they can serve different purposes, either as independent units or as part of a longer course (Borrás Gené (2012); 3) accessible because their digital format facilitates content storage and recovery (Barritt & Alderman, 2004; Olgren & Ploetz, 2007). More specifically, they are educational resources in an audiovisual format that function as short courses that guide on a specific topic or problem with a duration of between 5 and 10 minutes (Pérez Navío, Rodríguez Moreno & García Carmona, 2015; Sande Mayo, 2014; Úbeda Mansilla & Gómez-Ortiz, 2018).

Some of the essential benefits of educational mini-videos are as follows:

1. They consist of audiovisual material that students are already familiar with, as their format is similar to the one used on YouTube (Moreno & Mayer, 2007);
2. they condense the information to be transmitted in a few minutes, facilitating the assimilation of content in complex situations;
3. they are usually integrated into eLearning platforms, thereby facilitating the distribution of content in streaming mode from any mobile device at any time;
4. they promote the autonomous management of learning since contents are stored in an open repository in the virtual campus.

These benefits render educational mini-videos a solid point of reference for those teaching proposals or initiatives involving active learning methodologies based on the information and communications technologies.

On this basis, three lesson plans are shared in the lines following to illustrate the use of educational mini-videos for developing oral skills in ESP courses. Designed as a single block, they are targeted to university ESP students with post-intermediate/advanced level of English who are interested in developing their public relations and marketing skills. The ultimate aim of the three classes is that students should be able to identify a challenge associated with the field of computer engineering and present a solution to the problem in the form of an elevator pitch.

### **3. Lesson plans – Building up digital oral skills: the elevator pitch**

#### **LESSON 1**

**Level:** Post-Intermediate, Advanced

**Time:** 90 mins (could be more if teacher and students find the activity beneficial for the teaching-learning process)

**Aims:**

- To become familiar with elevator pitches
- To be able to develop a draft for an elevator pitch text

**Resources/materials:**

A room with a computer, a digital whiteboard, or a film projector, and speakers, Internet access

**Possible problems:**

Slow Internet connection; no Internet access; server failure

**Procedure:**

**1. Pre-stage:**

Students will learn about the aims of the lesson: to become familiar with elevator pitches, thereby to develop a draft for an elevator pitch text.

**2. While-stage:**

a) Students are familiarized with elevator pitches by watching some sample videos:

- *Apparcar*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GsnVWjjkPE4>;
- *Wayook*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0t9R6pWyXw>;
- *What is fiction express?* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RM8u92Tv5EU>)

b) The teacher introduces the structure of elevator pitches using the Elevator Pitch Template (Figure 1). Then, the students watch a 2-minute elevator pitch video delivered by Gavin Belson at the *Tech Crunch Disrupt* ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pplat\\_Mhe0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pplat_Mhe0)), a leading technology conference for debuting revolutionary startups and tech industry's key innovations.

Using the template in Figure 1, students identify the main elements of Belson's elevator pitch and summarize its main idea in a short text (about 50-70 words).

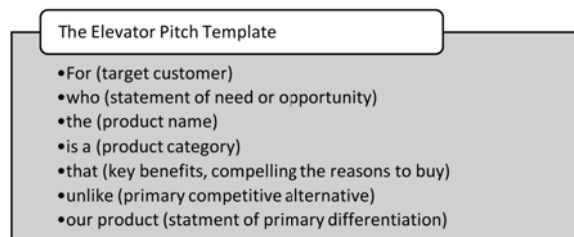


Figure 1. The Elevator Pitch Template

Source: Adapted from <https://wall-skills.com/2015/elevator-pitch-template/>

- c) The students work in groups of 3-4 to identify a challenge associated with the field of computer engineering and come up with a solution to the problem to be presented at the *Tech Crunch Disrupt*. Then, each member of the group creates an individual version of a short written text for the elevator pitch to be shared and discussed. Finally, the team members work together on a joint version of the document.

### 3. Post-stage:

In groups, students are asked to summarize the new knowledge acquired in the lesson.

## LESSON 2

**Level:** Post-Intermediate, Advanced

**Time:** 90 mins (could be more if teacher and students find the activity beneficial for the teaching-learning process)

### **Aims:**

1. To become familiar with the skills necessary for developing effective digital speeches
2. To learn how to develop a one-minute elevator pitch
3. To launch an elevator pitch on the social networks using emojis

### **Resources/materials:**

A room with a computer, a digital whiteboard or a film projector, and speakers, Internet access, a personal computer per group of students

### **Possible problems:**

Slow Internet connection; no Internet access; server failure

### **Procedure:**

#### 1) **Pre-stage:**

The teacher introduces the aim of the class: to create a one-minute elevator pitch and to launch it on the social networks using emojis.

#### 2) **While-stage:**

Students are familiarized with the main skills necessary for developing effective digital speeches, such as building and performing communications skills, and creating digital content skills (Figure 2):

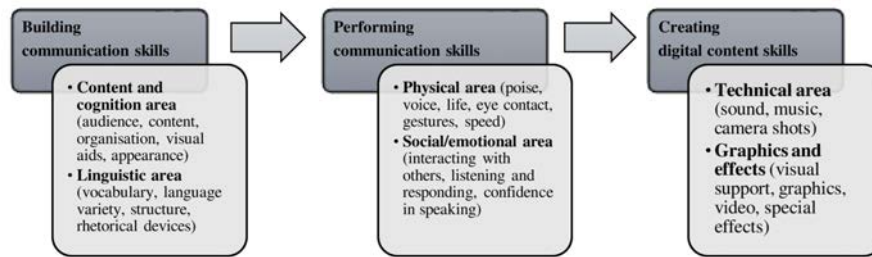


Figure 2. Criteria for developing effective digital speeches.

The teacher presents some authentic examples of elevator pitches delivered by UPM students:

- *Pass and Share*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrxTa432a44>
- *U-card*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CgIJ4ZohoFI>

Students watch and evaluate the videos in groups, using the **Elevator Pitch Video Assessment Sheet** (Attachment 1). The whole class analyzes the results.

### 3) Post-stage:

Students launch their pitches using a short advertising text and emojis (see Figure 3). They learn about some tips to take into consideration when translating texts into emojis (<http://clearwordstranslations.com/translating-emojis-top-tips/>) and become familiar with some emoji translators that are available on the Internet (e.g. <https://emojitranslate.com/>).



Figure 3. A sample text message with emojis

Source: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2886692.html>

#### 4) Homework:

- a) Students are asked to create one-minute video elevator pitches. They are advised to watch the following video in case they need some help to record and edit their videos with their mobile phones:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1X3480PRhZ4>

- b) Then, the elevator pitches are shared with the whole class on the *Moodle Forum*. Students are involved in an online debate, commenting on their classmates' ideas, as well as asking and answering the questions regarding their viability and efficiency.

### LESSON 3

**Level:** Post-Intermediate, Advanced

**Time:** 90 mins (could be more if the teacher and students find the activity beneficial for the teaching-learning process)

#### **Aims:**

1. To consolidate their previous knowledge on video pitches
2. To reflect upon the major strengths and weaknesses of their video pitches
3. To become familiar with the jigsaw learning methodology

#### **Resources/materials:**

A room with a computer, a digital whiteboard or a film projector, and speakers, Internet access, a personal computer per group of students

#### **Possible problems:**

Slow Internet connection; no Internet access; server failure

#### **Procedure:**

##### 1. Pre-stage:

The teacher introduces the aim of the class: To consolidate the knowledge acquired in the previous lessons through the assessment of the elevator pitches, reflecting upon their strengths and weaknesses.

##### 2. While-stage:

- a) Students watch a set of eight two-minute videos by Fred Miller, the author of the book *No sweat Elevator Speech!: How to craft your elevator speech, floor by floor, with no sweat!* (2014). Each video describes each of the eight stages or floors to be reached when working on an elevator pitch:

a. *First Floor!* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oM1kHAq9pIA;>

- b. *Second Floor!* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfljhPIGvcU>;
- c. *Third Floor!* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3VcZxs8h9A>;
- d. *Fourth Floor!* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R\\_eDAimLgPo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_eDAimLgPo);
- e. *Fifth Floor!* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hC15WxQ3VSM>;
- f. *Sixth Floor!* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mapOlfZ\\_smE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mapOlfZ_smE);
- g. *Seventh Floor!* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9j0j0L-T33w>;
- h. *Eighth Floor!*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?>

[v=iRcKrcxVbGM&list=UUdPmYk6oJx2Djbn9C8d38A&index=44](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRcKrcxVbGM&list=UUdPmYk6oJx2Djbn9C8d38A&index=44)).

- b) Following a jigsaw learning technique, a cooperative learning methodology that encourages both individual accountability and achievement of the team goals, the students are organized into eight ‘expert’ groups. Each ‘expert’ group summarizes one of Miller’s videos.
- c) Students are then shuffled into mixed groups; each group should include at least one member from each ‘expert’ group so that they all can have access to the eight summaries. Each group reconciles points of view and synthesizes information for each of the videos. Finally, they create a final report comprising all of the floors.
- d) The teacher presents the selection of the topmost ranking video pitches created and evaluated by students in the previous lesson and discusses them with the class according to Miller’s eight-floor recommendations.

### 3. Post-stage:

Students are asked to summarize what they have learned during the last three classes and to reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of their elevator pitches with the help of the SWOT analysis template in Figure 4.

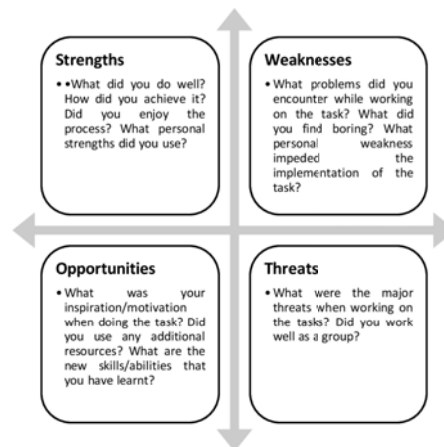


Figure 4. The SWOT analysis template



#### 4. Conclusions

This paper outlines the possibilities that educational mini-videos provide for fostering oral communication skills through active methodologies in the ESP engineering context. To illustrate the potential of mini-videos, we have created a set of three lesson plans focused on the genre of the elevator pitch to present new engineering products. We consider this resource an opportunity for curriculum renewal that facilitates and increases engineering students' performance and engagement. This will nurture the development of UPM students' effective oral communication skills, both within and beyond the classroom in the years to come.

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**Appendix. Elevator Pitch Video Assessment Sheet**

4 = Exemplary, skilled, marked by excellence.

3 = Competent, effective, accurate and clear, but lacks the exemplary depth, precision, and insight of a 4.

2 = Inconsistent, ineffective; shows a lack of consistent competence.

1 = Unskilled and insufficient.

	<b>Digital Oracy Skills</b>	<b>Level of competence</b> (from 1 to 4)
<b>Content area</b>	<p><b>Content:</b> Objectives and key ideas of the proposal are clearly stated in the video.</p> <p><b>Organization:</b> Good organizational structure; opening grabbed the listeners.</p> <p><b>Visual aids:</b> Visual aids were relevant.</p> <p><b>Audience:</b> Speech was perfectly designed for the audience and understandable.</p>	
<b>Linguistic area</b>	<p><b>Vocabulary:</b> The student incorporated a wide range of vocabulary appropriate to the topic; spoke clearly, with accurate pronunciation.</p> <p><b>Language variety:</b> A proper register was used (formal register).</p> <p><b>Structure:</b> Sentences were well constructed. There were very few grammar mistakes.</p>	
<b>Physical area</b>	<p><b>Poise:</b> The student appeared calm and confident; there was no distracting behaviour.</p> <p><b>Voice:</b> The student's voice was right for the space—not too loud or too soft; every word was heard; the student didn't mumble or blur words together.</p> <p><b>Gestures:</b> The student's hand, face, and body gestures were very effective.</p> <p><b>Speed:</b> The speed was appropriate: not too fast or too slow.</p>	
<b>Technical area</b>	<p><b>Sound, music and camera shots:</b> The camera was still and focused on the appropriate subject; timing was perfect: with enough time for viewers to grasp visuals.</p> <p><b>Graphics and special effects:</b> Introduction and ending graphics were engaging and relevant; sound effects and visual effects added to the mood and content.</p>	
	<b>TOTAL</b>	