Enhancing Public Speaking Skills with Special Reference to Undergraduate Students

Tiakaba Jamir

Research Scholar, School of Arts and Humanities, REVA University Bengaluru, (Karnataka)

India

Dr. C. Chamundeshwari

Asst. Professor, School of Arts and Humanities, REVA University Bengaluru, (Karnataka) India

Abstract

Public Speaking is an art and skill to perform. It is one of the need-based requirements for people who are speakers of the language to make impact, persuade and inspire others. It is not just being good at speaking the language but to perform speaking in front of different crowds is an art that can be acquired, although some might have been born with such talent. This study is done with an aim to understand the drawback of the students' public speaking skills and further helping them to improve their public speaking skills and techniques. In this study, some practical methods and strategies have been applied on the target group of students. This would enable the students to have good employment opportunities and gain personal confidence in life.

Key Words: Public speaking skills, UG students, higher education

Introduction

What is Public Speaking?

Public speaking can be defined as continuous formal presentation to an audience made by a presenter. It generally serves three purposes: to inform, to persuade and to entertain. Public speaking is commonly understood as formal, face-to-face speaking of a single person to a group of listeners (Wrench 139). According to Lasswell's Model of Communication, there are five basic elements of public speaking: the communicator, message, medium, audience and effect. In other words, the speaker should be answering the question "*who* says *what* in which *channel* to *whom* with what *effect*?" (Zachary 602)

Public speaking can serve the purpose of transmitting information, telling a story, motivating people to act, or a best man's speech at a wedding reception; a eulogy to praise the dead; a commencement speech at graduation; or presenting an award. It is important to note that these general purposes may overlap one another. One might wish to use some forms of entertainment while informing or persuading his or her audience (Lisa 7). As its name implies, it is a way of communication that will make one's ideas public. Through public speaking, one can share his/her ideas with people and can influence people thoughts too.

Most of the educators and researchers believe and agree that excellent public speaking skills are essential requirements for ESL students' academic, personal and professional success (Nicosia 74; Morreale et al., 278; Emanuel 153). Unfortunately, many people although good at language, fail to perform good public speaking. Number of research suggests that people have fear and anxiety while speaking publicly. At the

same time, there are speakers who are unable to draw or grab the attention of the audience and thus become ineffective in letting the listeners to sleep.

Literature Review

It is said that Public Speaking is one of the most reported fears in the American public (Brewer 30–31). Robin Chandler, the founding partner at Impact Factory says "public speaking creates anxiety in all of us –even those who do it all the time" (Emma *The Art of Public Speaking*). In fact, as many of us know first-hand, "most people experience some level of anxiety about public speaking" (Griffin 37).

Taylor (2011) had conducted a research on the effectiveness of self- and peer-review on communication apprehension and speech performance of undergraduate students. The aim of this study was to find out if self- and peer-reviews affect communication apprehension and speech performance comprising of 183 undergraduate students. The results from the data showed that students in the peer-review group had significantly better scores on their speech performance evaluations from speech 1 to speech 3 to that of students in the self-review treatment.

Pribyl et al. (2001) conducted a study to test the effectiveness of a skill-based program as a method or way for reducing anxiety during public speaking. Twenty-five Japanese of second year college students were exposed to a systematic approach for developing a presentation that was theoretically linked to mechanisms to reduce communication apprehension (CA). Students gave four presentations that were graded by both teacher and peer evaluation. Results pointed out that the experimental group reported to have a significantly greater drop in public speaking anxiety than that of a control group of 86 students.

Johnson (2012) in his study examined the effect of previous public speaking instruction, public speaking extra-curricular activity, gender, and self-esteem on public speaking anxiety for students in a college-level public speaking course. The findings from the study show that the students with prior instruction or public speaking extra-curricular experience had lower levels of public speaking anxiety.

Kushner (2010), in his book depicts some very plain yet very effective strategies to overcome the fear of public speaking as well as delivering good presentations. He introduces off by describing effective styles for opening and ending a speech. Asking some rhetorical questions, a quotation for the opening or conclusion can be used to engage the audience and grab their attention.

Hence, the above literature review depicts that much research has been done to promote public speaking, especially overcoming the anxiety and fear. This shows that the importance of public speaking. Reducing anxiety and fear and becoming confident for public speaking is to have some innovative strategies and methods being employed upon the learners.

Methodology

The study comprises of 31 undergraduate Indian students from different branches and streams such as engineering, management, commerce who joined an academy to develop their speaking skills especially

Public Speaking. The researcher himself conducted the class as a trainer for the batch for 3 weeks related to Public Speaking. A pre-test was conducted with a parameter to evaluate their level and find out the drawback of Public Speaking in them. Also a post-test was conducted after some techniques and strategies were taught to them to see the difference between the tests.

The learning methods were in three phases sequentially - Drilling, Filtering, and Performing.

Components for Good Public Speaking

As per the experience of the researcher as a public speaker, some of the basic components or elements for a good public speaker are laid down below. These are also agreed by many scholars and good public speakers.

•   Confidence- "A highly confident speaker is viewed as being more accurate, competent, credible, intelligent, knowledgeable, likable, and believable than less confident uncertain speaker" according to a study published by the University of Wolverhampton (Peter Khoury). Being confident is one of the first requirements to be a public speaker.

•   Body Language- Non-Verbal Communication which conveys a lot of messages and also the proper usages of hand gestures, appropriate postures, good eye contact and facial expressions with confident.

•   Audibility and Voice Modulation- Being audible does not mean being loud. It is a volume used in proportion to the number of audience, size of the stage and hall. It is an ability to reach the audience to be heard. On the other hand, speaking with modulation of voice draws the attention of the audience. People often get bored listening to a monotonous speech or talk. Making use of right pitch, tone and pause in speech will create great impact upon the listeners.

•   Creativity and Presence of Mind- Being creative and having presence of mind or ability to think on one's own feet while delivering speeches is an added advantage. To connect the main subject, one can tell stories, anecdotes, and humours, small act (body language) to the audience. This will help to build a good rapport between the speaker and the audience.

•   Content- Justice to the topic that is the ultimate goal for any public speakers. At the end of the day, the message should have been communicated rightly to the audience.

•   Specific context as to what he/she wants to speak. Beating around the bush and discussing any odd and irrelevant points should be avoided because it can turn off the ears of the listeners. Whatever the speaker says should sound sensible so that the audience can connect with it.

Methods and Strategies

Many creative ways can be used for teaching public speaking to help students learn how to speak effectively in front an audience. In the light of this, some methods and strategies have been employed to help them overcoming stage fear and further filtering them to speak confidently before the audience.

The strategies have been divided into three phases- *Drilling, Filtering, and Performing*

Drilling Phase – In this phase, the students were given practice to speak on stage in front of the audience. To help them overcome the stage fear and anxiety while speaking publicly. This was done for a week regularly.

Some daily activities were conducted-

News for the Day- In this activity, some students were asked to come and share some hot news. This is an assignment given one day ahead to present on the next/following day. News was of any type as per the interest of the speakers- sports, technology, politics, economics etc. A time frame was given to speak for 3- 4 minutes for every selected student.

Thought for the Day- In this activity, the students frames a famous line, quotation, or proverb with a thought and explain the same to the class.

Word for the Day- Here, the students were asked to give a talk on a particular word. It showcases how the students logically and coherently organise the talk with just one word. For example word *like Peace, Change, and Technology etc.*

Impromptu talk- Some impromptu speech/talk was conducted to help students think quickly and rationally eventually summing up with a good public speaking. The topics were randomly given by the classmates and sometimes by the trainer or at times they would pick topics (prepared by the trainer) from a box and speak instantly.

Filtering Phase- After the drilling phase was over; the following week (second week) was to filter. Here, the students were asked to plan and prepare on their chosen topics, then practice in front of the class. While practicing/rehearsing, the trainer had to give feedback in light of the *basic components of public speaking* as discussed above. The students had become more into technical aspect of learning and speaking. First, they were asked to present for 5 minutes and eventually 7 minutes. The students could practice for at least twice before *the performing phase.* This phase has helped the students to sharpening and polishing their art and style of public speaking being guided by the trainer.

Performing Phase- This was the final phase that all the students had to perform officially as a part of the requirements for the fulfillment of the course/training. Some students from other batches were the invited audience and three trainers as judges for their public speaking contest. This phase has also been for the post-test as per the requirement of the research which the researcher had taken and evaluated. In this phase, the students did much better here than before.

Research Findings

Before the modules were started, all the students had to give a public speaking based on their chosen topics in the form of pre-test. The mean score on this test was 39.02%. After having taught the modules, the post-test was conducted simultaneously during their *Performing Phase.* The mean score of the post-test was 73.86%. Hence, we can see that there is a significant improvement on their public speaking skills after learning the modules.

Discussion

This study has produced several important results. These are discussed below. The post-test mean score of the students' public speaking abilities was significantly higher than the pre-test one after the employing the three-phase modules-*Drilling, Filtering and Performing*. Prior to learning the modules, the students had lacked many skills of public speaking which could analyze with the help of pre-test. They could not face the crowd confidently, stage fear and a kind of anxiety was seen in many of them. Some of them could speak of good contents but failed extremely on their body language and voice modulation. It was also observed that there had been lots of mother tongue fillers usage while speaking, for Hindi speaking people fillers like, '*kyu ki, matlab, tho ki'*. Over all, it was noticed that there had been many loopholes during the pre-test evaluation.

However, after the modules were taught and a constant feedback given by the trainer during their course of learning, the students could do much better validated by their performance done in the post-test. Many of them could speak boldly and confidently in addition to other skills of public speaking. Their anxiety and stage fear level has drastically decreased.

While interacting and discussing with the students in class, students responded to the learning positively. Some of them said that their flow of speaking and fluency level has also been developed. Some of them were from non-English environment and institutes but agrees to have become better at speaking skills using correct language delivery, especially during Public Speaking. The students also rated and commented the learning as good and successful as it has met the objective of the course. They felt satisfied with their speaking English especially of Public Speaking.

Conclusion:

The process of teaching and learning helped creating enjoyment in the classroom. The feelings of success in learning to speak English publicly through various activities establish their motivation to learn the language more and practice the same in their day to day life. Hence, it can be recommended to have such modules for undergraduate level students and learners to promote public speaking skills. On the other hand, constant feedback given by the trainer especially of *sandwich feedback* (feedback consists of both positive and areas of improvement), will be good and handy for the teaching and learning process of this module.

Bibliography:

Brewer, H. "Ten Steps to Success". *Journal of Staff Development* 22.1(2001): 30-31. Print.

Emanuel, R. "A Rationale for the Basic Course: Fundamentals of Oral Communication vs. Public Speaking." *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 29 (2005): 153-162. Print.

Griffin, C. L. *Invitation to public speaking (3rd ed.).* Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009.

Johnson K. H. *The Effect of a High School Speech Course on Public Speaking Anxiety for Students in a College-Level Public Speaking Class.* PhD. dissertation, Faculty of Trevecca Nazarene University School of Education, 2012.

Khoury, Peter. "The Top 9 Characteristics of Effective Public Speakers." Web. 24 July 2018 https://magneticspeaking.com/the-top-9-characteristics-of-effective-public-speakers/

Kushner, *M. Public Speaking for Dummies.* John Wiley & Sons, 2010.

Morreale, S. Spitzberg, B. & Barge, J. *Human Communication: Motivation, Knowledge and Skills.* USA: Thomson Learning, 2001.

Nicosia, G. *Implementing Public Speaking Skills across the Curriculum.* Community Review, 15, 1997.

Pomfret, Emma. The Art of Public Speaking. Impact Factory. Web. 12 December 2018 https://www.impactfactory.com/library/public-speaking-article

Pribyl, C. B., Keaten, J., & Sakamoto, M. "The Effectiveness of a Skills-Based Program in Reducing Public Speaking Anxiety." *Japanese Psychological Research Short* 43.3 (2001): 148–155. Print.

Schreiber, Lisa. *Public Speaking: The Virtual Text.* USA: Donna Painter Graphics, 2003.

Taylor, A. D. The effectiveness of self-and peer-review on communication apprehension and speech performance of undergraduate students. A PhD thesis- University of South Alabama – College of education, 2011.

Wrench, Jason S. et al. Public Speaking: Practice and Ethics (v. 1.0). Web. 8 December 2018 https://2012books.lardbucket.org/pdfs/public-speaking-practice-and-ethics.pdf

Zachary S. Sapienza, Narayanan Iyer and Aaron S. Veenstra. *Reading Lasswell's Model of Communication Backward: Three Scholarly Misconceptions.* Mass Communication Society, 18.5 (2015): 599-622. Print.

Appendix

Public Speaking Assessment

Pre-Test and Post-Test Format/Sample

No. of Students: 31   Level: UG   Period of Assessment: 3 Weeks

Sl.No.	Name	Confidence	Body Language	Creativity & Presence of Mind	Content	Audibility and Voice Modulation	Total
1.	x	5	6	6	8	7	32
2.	y	3	5	4	6	5	23
3.	z	7	6	7	8	8	36

 *Each component carries 10 marks (later converts them to percentage)