

Speech and Presentation Skills

A Proposed Course Designed for Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

The ability to speak in public or even in a small group of people is a common problem among university students in both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The problem gets more serious when a student is required to introduce or present his/her work. Lack of necessary communication, speech and presentation skills is the main cause behind the student's fear of public speaking and consequently failure to deliver an acceptable outcome. This paper aims at introducing a course design in speech and presentation skills. This proposed course targets undergraduate students aiming at opening new insights in the art

and science of communication. The main aim of this course is to solve the problem of low performance by the student in using English as a combination of listening, negotiating and speaking. This course was primarily introduced to the first semester at the postgraduate level at Zawia University to a number of fifteen students where it proved satisfactory and achieved its aims and objectives. Having delivered a number of presentations, students get used to the feel of giving a presentation and build confidence through practice. Students took part in this study became able to prepare and structure a presentation and perform the required research for the presentation. They also became able to manage the presentation and question timing besides being familiar with the use of technology. A research question became prominent. Can this course be beneficial if introduced to undergraduate students? This study arrived at significant outcomes as the designed course applied to third semester at the undergraduate level. Interest shown by students played a vital role in the success of the course.

The researcher recommends that this course should be included as a part in the curriculum designed for the English departments in the faculties of Arts and Education.

Key words: *course design, presentation skills, body language, Skills-centered approach*

1. Introduction

A well studied and designed course in speech and presentation skills will provide the student with the necessary skills needed to present him/herself or his/her work confidently, knowledgeably, persuasively and effectively at any academic situation or assessment. In order to produce an integrated series of teaching-learning experiences whose ultimate aim

is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge, skill and real practice, this course is designed to interpret the raw data about a learning need. The skill of public speaking and oral presentation needs to be considered as a set of acquired skills not as a talent. Also as a set of techniques studied, practiced, rehearsed and then delivered with impact in an effective manner. Ilardo, 1981 cited in Hamm (2006:10) defines presentation as a means of persuasion that is a communicative process of altering the beliefs, attitudes, intentions, or behavior of another by the conscious and unconscious use of words and nonverbal messages. Learning from every presentation they deliver, students acquire the feel, the rules and norms of being good speakers and presenters. Compared with the pre-assessment tasks carried out for all students, this course has proved vital due to the good results and learning outcomes achieved throughout the theoretical and practical course content. Considering that the problem of lack of skills in oral presentation should be solved at an earlier stage of university education, the researcher introduced this proposed course as module to replace an existing course titled “Oral Practice” prescribed for the third semester in the Faculty of Education. According to the interest shown by students as well as the significant outcomes, it is recommended that this course should be considered as a vital part in the curriculum designed for the English departments in the faculties of Arts and Education.

2. Methodology and Course Description

This course is designed for undergraduate 2nd year third semester students of English. The main aim is to develop students’ communication and language skills in order to plan and deliver an effective speech and presentation. “The purpose of communication is to transmit a message

about our experiences or perceptions and to express our point of view about those experiences and perceptions” (Hamm, 2006:9). Students will be taken systematically through the key stages of giving presentations, from planning, researching and introducing to concluding and handling questions. It adopts a Skills-centered approach which looks at the competence that underlies the performance. As Hutchinson and Waters confirm (1987: p 69) “A skills centered course, therefore, will present its learning objectives (though probably not explicitly) in terms of both performance and competence”. This course aims at:

- Providing a structured framework whereby students are given the opportunity to reflect upon their existing language skills.
- Identify skill areas of planning, preparing and delivering a speech or a presentation and familiarizing students with different techniques and structures of presentations.
- Developing students’ skills, through presenting their work in workshops and class seminars.

On completion of the course, students will be able to:

- use English in various topics and situations.
- Acquire the feel, the rules and the norms.
- plan, prepare, research and structure a presentation and use technology properly.
- overcome the fear of public speaking

3. Designing a Course

One of the main elements of a well-formed course is what approach to adopt in constructing its basis. Researchers stress the necessity of knowing the different approaches to course design. A course has to be based on one or a combination of two or three approaches.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) put forward three main approaches to course design. These approaches are still in effect and gaining grounds in the field of languages course design. They provide a full coverage of all related aspects, notions and theories that should be considered as grounds for the design of any course. Throughout this section we will attempt to discuss the three approaches identified by Hutchinson and Waters (1987). The aim is to determine which approach or approaches that can suit the design of our proposed course. These approaches are 1. Language Centered Approach. 2. Skill Centered Approach. 3. Learning Centered Approach.

3.1. Language Centered Approach

It is the simplest and more familiar kind to English teachers. It aims to draw as direct a connection as possible between the analysis of the target situation and the content of the course. A language-centered approach claims that the nature of the target situation performance determines the intended course. Hutchinson and Waters (1987:66) state that this approach proceeds by identifying learners' target situation and selecting in parallel theoretical views about the language, then identifying the linguistic features of the target situation. Then, creating a syllabus which is followed by designing materials to exemplify syllabus items. The final step in this approach is establishing evaluation procedures to test the acquisition of syllabus items.

Being a straightforward process, the language-centered course design seems to contradict with the fact of thinking in learning and by learners, as this required thinking cannot be always straightforward and logical. Basturkmen (2010: 59) criticizes this approach of producing systematic learning in the learner by basing it on the systematic analysis

and presentation of linguistic data characterizing a certain type of specialized discourse. The language-centered course design has a number of weaknesses:

- a) it is meant to be a learner-centered approach due to the claim that it starts from the learners and their needs, but as a matter of fact and in reality its not learner-centered. The learner here is apparently used as a means of identifying the target situation.
- b) The language-centered process can also be criticized for being a static and inflexible procedure.
- c) The language-centered analysis of target situation data is only at the surface level. It reveals very little about the competence that underlined the performance

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) point out the weaknesses of language centered approach as:

- a) The learning needs of students are not accounted for at all. It is therefore not learner centered but simply learner restricted.
- b) This language centered approach is a static and inflexible procedure which contradicts with the nature of needs analysis which is an ongoing process and authentic one that should never be static.
- c) The language centered approach gives no acknowledgment to factors playing part in the creation of the course like the types of texts chosen to be included in the course for example. These texts may be boring to students

3.2. Skills Centered Approach

The main aim of this approach has been to help learners to develop their skills and strategies that continue after the course by making learners better processors and skilled presenters of information. The skills-centered approach to course design is based on the theoretical

hypothesis that underling any language behavior. There are certain skills and strategies, which the learner uses in order to produce or comprehend discourse (Creswell, 2003:124). A skills-centered approach indicates that we must look behind target performance data to discover what processes enable someone to perform. Those processes will determine the required course. The skills-centered approach fundamentally based on these two principles:

- a. The core theoretical hypothesis is that underlying any language behavior are certain skills and strategies, which the learner uses in order to perform.
- b. The pragmatic basis for the skills-centered approach derives from a distinction made by Widdowson (1981) between goal-oriented courses and process oriented courses.

It is vital at the outset to consider how significant the needs analysis in relation to the skill-centered approach is. Needs analysis plays two roles in a skill-centered approach: On one hand, it provides a basis for discovering the essential competence that enables people to perform in the target situation. On the other hand, it enables the course designer to discover the potential knowledge and abilities that the learners bring to the course.

Comparing the skills-centered approach with the language-centered model it can be said that the skills centered approach provides more focus on the learner and his/her role in the course in addition to enabling him/her to achieve something valuable from the course. Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 70) state that “yet, in spite of its concern for the learner, the skills-centered approach still approaches the learner as a user of language rather than as a learner of language. The processes it is concerned with are the processes of language use not of language

learning”. Nevertheless, as far as speech and presentation skills course is concerned, it can be concluded that the focus of our proposed course would be on the learner as a user of the language acquired from other language courses in the curriculum together with knowledge and skills that can be gained throughout the running of this course.

3.3. Learning Centred Approach

The central principle of this model says that learning is totally determined by the learner. According to this approach, teachers can influence what to teach, whereas, learning is determined by the learners alone. Learning is dealt with as a process in which the learners use what knowledge or skills they have in order to make sense of the flow of new information. A learning-centered approach directs the course designer to look beyond the competence that enables someone to perform, because what is really wanted to be discovered is not the competence itself, but how this competence is acquired.

To sum up the above approaches to course design, it apparent that the language-centered approach concentrates on performance, the skills-centered approach concentrates on competence and the learning-centered approach concentrates on how to get such competence. According to the nature of needs analysis which is an ongoing process, the skills-centered approach can be adopt as convenient for a speech and presentation skills course as it approaches the learner as a user of language rather than as a learner of language.

4. Students / Samples

- a. A small group of 15 fifteen postgraduate 1st semester students, majority females, took part in this study. Some of the students were recently graduated from English department, Zawia University and some with a little teaching experience in secondary schools. Students

underwent the above course material delivered according to the previously prescribed methodologies. Students were taught for a full semester of sixteen weeks and took a mid-term and a final exam as well as regular assessments done through the lecture activities, seminars and assignments.

- b. A large group of 40 forty female undergraduate students of English language from third semester in the Faculty of Education at Zawia University were targeted as suitable sample for this study. This group is characterised with lack of confidence in speaking and communication skills according to the pre-assessment test and questionnaire of needs assessment.

5. Needs Analysis and Feedback

A needs analysis interview and a questionnaire carried out to the undergraduate group. This group was accordingly characterised with lack of confidence in speaking, lack of presentation or public speaking skills and have fear of presenting assignments and projects. Students claim that they have no previous knowledge, practice or assessment in such a subject or activity. No previous chances like seminars or speeches have been given to the students to develop their courage or speaking performance. Students have not been subjected to facing audiences or presenting any parts of their work in class or on stage.

Within the educational process, course design is a second important step, following training needs analysis. It is that component by which the information about learning needs of the students is understood and interpreted in order to produce teaching /course materials (CHIRIMBU and CHIRIMBU 2014: 58). In order to diver a well-formed course design, insure that the course material and the outline are sufficient, suitable and adequately built for the students with regard to

knowledge, capabilities, skills and time scale, the full course has to be double checked. The course has to be carefully checked with a colleague to look it over and react to the strengths or possible weaknesses. Is there enough material and activities to challenge the students intellectually and sustain their interest and active participation? Is there any chance or a room to incorporate students' suggestions? Finally, will students emerge with not only more information, but also new skills and capabilities?

6. Running the Course

This proposed course is designed to be carried out through lectures, student seminars, workshops, classroom group exercises and discussions. Audiovisual material of public speeches (learning by imitation) is also a vital part for the successful execution and outcome of the course. Lectures include presentations by the course tutor in various topics in order to guide students to the process and skills of preparing and delivering a presentation. Accordingly, students should acquire how to do presentation individually and in groups. Student presentations and oral performance should be the core elements of student assessment.

7. Course Material, Activities and Methodologies

a. Building Student Presence

Through practical vocal drills, breathing exercises and body language warm-ups the course builds student presence and confidence. The aim here is to master and command the skills of voice and body language, learning vocal projection, pace, stance, posture, gesture and movement.

b. Supporting Student Knowledge

By concise briefings on best practice, case study examples, practical tips and rules for what works in successful communication, the course material supports student knowledge and provides sufficient

background. Students must be provided with sufficient material covering content and structure. They should learn about preparation, organization, narrative, framing, messaging and visual aids (including PowerPoint).

c. Developing Interpersonal Skills

Via role-play exercises and structured discussions, students will gradually enhance their communication, interaction and interpersonal skills. They should practice audience engagement, learning how to connect and interact with audience, secure and maintain their attention, interest and respect, and manage questions and discussions.

d. Encouraging learning by doing

Supporting students through a series of brief practice presentations will motivate students to acquire the required skills by doing and putting their hands on them. Having this achieved, students will get to the intended quality of execution, learning to deliver presentations with greater confidence, authority and impact.

8. The Assessment Process

Students are given a number of assigned presentations to prepare and deliver. Some tasks are intended for practice and others are for regular assessment. Student presentations are frequently assessed and may be awarded a percentage of the marks that contribute to the overall module mark and credits (Chivers and Shoolbred 2007:05). Students prepare and deliver the following:

- A speech in a topic of their choice.
- A power point presentation of 10 minutes (individually).
- A power point presentation of 16 min (in a group of 4).
- A poster or a leaflet for a specific topic.

Students will be given:

- a pre-assessment test to evaluate and determine their level and capabilities,
- a written test for mid term and final exam that covers the theoretical and instructional parts. Regular assessments are carried out through the lecture activities, seminars and assignments,
- a questionnaire that investigates student's satisfaction about the course, the course material, difficulties and shortcomings.

9. Challenges

The number of students in large groups in the undergraduate level represents a serious obstacle in the process of running the course and in the way of delivering and performing the required course activities. Then again, various strategies should be applied in order to allow full participation of students. Small group activities are designed four groups of four to six students in the form of role playing, acts, group presentations and seminars.

Course time limitation can also be an obstacle if the course is not adequately formed to match the fourteen-week semester. The course tutor should clarify course objectives, student involvement, roles and rules as well as course material and forms of assessment from the outset. This will encourage student commitment and regular participation on one hand. On the other hand, the course tutor will abide by the course plan as an obligation made to his/her students.

In order to achieve the best outcome from such a course the English language teacher must undergo an intensive training in teaching communication and presentation skills in English. Teacher training should include teaching strategies, course design and material development, testing and assessment, in addition to large and small group teaching as well as the techniques of speech and presentation.

10. Conclusion and Findings

Most students enjoy learning by doing. Some students love teaching others. Students like to show their work but fear presenting it. Some like doing presentations but fear the questioning. Students quickly surprise you with their command of the technology, the tools and the rules. One of the important outcomes of this course is to convince and lead the students to the fact that there is never a perfect speech, but a powerful and effective speech and presentation. This contentment serves as source of encouragement for the students to speak, communicate or act in full confidence and satisfaction. Finally, this proposed course can suit both small and large groups up to 40 students with well designed outline, material, activities and time management.

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