

A C.A.L.L FOR ENHANCING PUBLIC SPEAKING SKILLS IN ENGLISH- AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY AT IBRA COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT: In Oman, English is taught as a foreign language unlike in India and the students of Ibra College of Technology are mainly from rural areas. In fact, many of them are first generation learners and their exposure to English is quite limited. Therefore, they face numerous problems while speaking in English and as a consequence they shy away from speaking in general and public speaking in particular. With a view to addressing the aforementioned problem, the Research and Consultancy team in collaboration with Ibra Toastmasters Club conducted a speech contest and all the participants were subsequently trained using the C.A.L.L techniques. The results were remarkable and encouraging. This research paper presents the method, employment and the results of the experimental study. Besides, this paper also analyses the participants' feedback to ascertain how the stakeholders perceived the training program and the impact it had on them.

KEYWORDS: C.A.L.L, public speaking, first generation learners, Colleges of Technology (CoTs)

I. INTRODUCTION

It is an undeniable fact that speaking as a skill is vitally important in general and foreign/second language learning in particular. However, it also turns out that speaking seems to be the most neglected skill in EFL/ESL contexts. While teachers mostly concentrate on reading and writing, students' speaking skills remain undeveloped or underdeveloped. A research study conducted by Sivraman, Ilango et al. in Oman indicates that one third of the students do not understand the lectures delivered in English fully well and one fourth of the students do not want to speak up for the fear of being incorrect or being unintelligible. They don't clarify their doubts because they don't have the requisite English speaking skills (31). Most of the teachers opine that many students do not have basic proficiency in English despite their having completed the school education. Said Al-Saadi et al. record that the challenges faced by the students cuts across the board irrespective of gender and regional differences (77). If speaking English is considered difficult, public speaking is almost dreaded by the students. Glossophobia is quite common among the students in Oman. This problem is abundantly evident in Ibra College where most of the students come from rural areas and they happen to be first generation learners. Considering these constraints faced by the students, the Research and Consultancy Committee in collaboration with Ibra Toastmasters Club organized a training program with a view to enhancing their public speaking skills. The methods and strategies followed in the training program and the feedback analysis form the core of the paper.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The ability to speak effectively is one of the factors for great success. People with good public speaking ability can easily influence their superiors, colleagues and subordinates. Students are the pillars of the society and they carry the hopes and dreams of the society. In order for them to achieve those targets and materialize the vision, effective and empowering skills enhancement programs are extremely important. Among the vital skills required for success and satisfaction, public speaking holds a preeminent place. Warren Buffett said that public speaking is one skill, if mastered, would boost one's career value by 50%. Therefore, the students need to be trained well on public speaking. Though public speaking is vitally important, it continues to be a major problem for many students. More so in the case of Arab learners. Public speaking in English appears to be the insurmountable hurdle on their path to self-development and better career prospects. Abbad says that students from the Arab world face so many difficulties when it comes to communicating in English (15). Most Arab learners encounter difficulties in communicating freely in English. Most of the students in Ibra College are not even remotely found to engage themselves in English conversation notwithstanding persistent pressure from the teachers and the administration. One of the graduate attributes of the CoTs in Oman is to achieve the ability to communicate effectively. However, it still remains a distant dream. Practice in speaking is imperative for students to be able to communicate fluently and effectively. However, different forms of public speaking like,

individual talk, group discussion, meetings and stage performance strike fear in the minds of students. This conundrum creates a vicious loop of escapism. Though the students are aware of the importance of practice, they take to their heels at the very thought of speaking in public. With a view to finding a solution to this problem, the Research and Consultancy team decided to teach the students some time-tested yet simple techniques to help them overcome their problems. This research work is rooted in the conviction that any complex activity can be made easier by breaking it into easy, intelligible and actionable steps.

Whitworth and Cochran affirm that students should be given some level of skill training because it helps them get rid of the lack of certainty of public speaking situations by giving the tools and expertise for effective public speaking. Ayers and Daly et al. affirm that poor speech preparation practices are the main cause of severe speech anxiety. Allen categorically asserts that the most important aim of skill training is to correct people with skill deficiencies before they can speak. Supposedly, a person's level of communication apprehension decreases when he or she has gained the knowledge and techniques needed to speak effectively. Numerous research articles reported their success stories with skills training and they iterated that skills training approach is found to be effective in reducing communication apprehension. In the same vein, many researchers felt that the idea of skills training is not only to give skills and knowledge for effective public speaking, but also to involve them in discussions about anxiety of public speaking. Basic public speaking course, according to Robinson, is the "ideal setting" for the treatment of anxiety related to public speaking (188). The importance of effective communication skills are recognized even in several fields outside of communication as the society enters the information age.

III. C.A.L.L – A PRACTICAL STRATEGY

The inspiration for this study springs from the conviction that Toastmasters International experience can lead to the enhancement of public speaking skills in English. However, it was felt that locally-relevant techniques should be developed to train the students. Keeping this mind, the Research and Consultancy Committee constituted a team which comprised both Toastmasters and public speaking teachers from Ibra College of Technology. The team developed a few strategies after scholarly discussions and research and decided to experiment those strategies. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of the home-grown public speaking skill enhancement techniques, (henceforth referred to as C.A.L.L.), on developing Ibra College of Technology students' communicative competence, specifically their public speaking skills.

In order to orient the readers to the concepts of C.A.L.L., a brief discussion is given below:

C stands for collect and collate. This focuses on the importance of good speech organization. Students are trained to take the time to put their ideas together in an orderly manner, hence collect and collate. They are taught the importance of opening, body, and conclusion. The opening should catch the audience's attention, the body must support the idea they want to convey, and the conclusion should reinforce their ideas and be memorable (11). Therefore, the students are reminded time and again of the importance of logical progression, cohesion and time constraints.

A stands for anecdote. Anecdote is a short story about a real incident or person. Here, the students are taught how to make their speeches personal. Students are taught to use quotes, stories and anecdotes to add drama and impact to their speeches. Human interest stories and anecdotes attract the audience's interest and add meaning and credibility to their message.

L stands for 'let the audience speak too'. Dale Carnegie suggests that public speakers should make their audience a partner in their talk and adds that the speaker could choose some member of the audience to help demonstrate a point or dramatize an idea (66). The speaker can ask questions that would involve the audience. When the listeners are involved in the listening actively, the speech is all set to be memorable and impactful.

L means 'last is not the least'. This part encourages the students to end their speeches with powerful concluding remarks. The speech conclusion is the final opportunity for the speakers to convey their message and main points in a manner that would help the audience remember them. The conclusion should reinforce the central ideas and leave listeners with a lasting impression (14). Stephen Lucas suggests that the speakers should end on a dramatic, clever or thought-provoking note (203). Amit Kukreja opines that conclusions provide a sense of closure to the audience. Moreover, the principle of recency suggests that audience remember vividly what happened last. Therefore, finishing on a high is of paramount importance when it comes to public speaking. .

IV. SPEECH CONTEST, THE TRAINING PROGRAM AND THE FEEDBACK

The committee wanted to identify students who would be interested in public speaking. Therefore, the team organized a speech contest on Oman National Day about the culture and tradition of Oman. After the contest, the team conducted a series of training programs employing the C.A.L.L strategy. Mentors were assigned to each trainee and their progress was monitored regularly. At the end of the training program, the trainees delivered the same speech with modifications incorporated from the insights gained from the C.A.L.L strategy. Both the students and the teachers felt that their story telling skills and delivery skills showed significant signs of improvement. The trainees’ feedback is quite encouraging and enthusing as well.

I liked the idea of a speech contest.
7 responses



Figure 1. Students’ Feedback about the idea of Speech Contest

The training was very useful.
7 responses

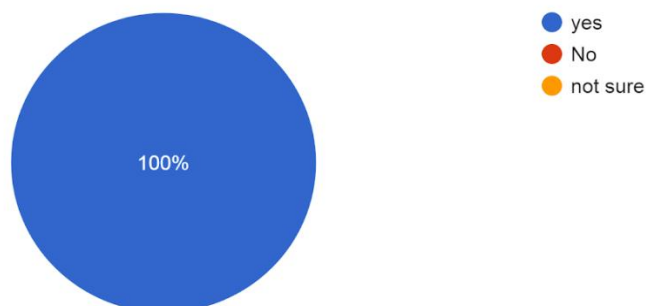


Figure 2. Students’ Feedback about the Training

Looking at the feedback from Figure 1 and 2, it is quite evident that the trainees liked both the idea of the speech contest and the conduct of the training program. The fact is competitions generate immense interest and competitive spirit among the participants. Almost all the participants felt that the training program was very useful. Therefore, it is easy to conclude that students might be interested in short and target-oriented training programs.

The techniques were practical and made us more confident.

7 responses

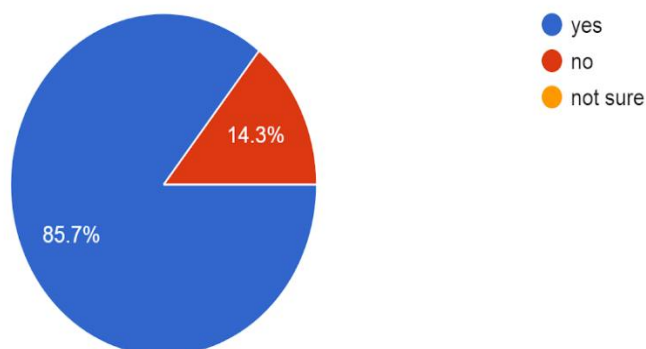


Figure 3. Students’ Feedback about the Techniques

The feedback for Figure 3 seems to drive home one salient point. Though 85.7% respondents in the survey thought that the techniques were practical and made them more confident, one respondent disagreed. It can be deduced from the feedback that students need time to master the art of public speaking though they are taught techniques. This could certainly be true of many students in the college as only seven students volunteered to take part in the contest. They need to be given many opportunities to overcome stage fear. One short training program may not be enough, but it seems safe to assume that consistent and sustained efforts would yield the desired results for the vast majority of the students in the college.

I feel I can speak effectively now.

7 responses

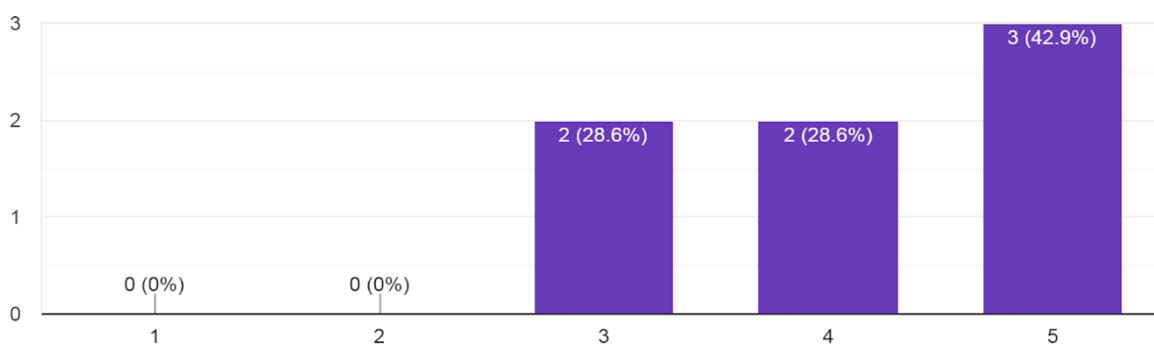


Figure 4. Self- Assessment of Students

Though more than 70% students placed it on 4 and above on a scale of 5, it is beyond any reasonable doubt that one training program alone is not enough to bring about lasting changes in the students’ confidence level. In fact, it should be an on-going program.

I will join the contests again if they conduct it again
7 responses

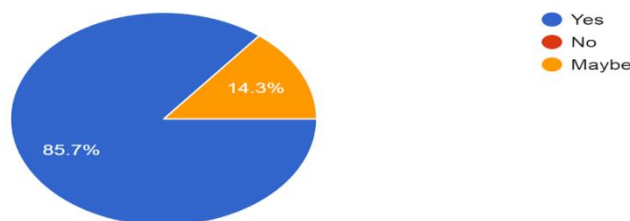


Figure 5. Students' Opinion about Future Contests

As can be seen from Figure 5, 85.7 % of the students expressed their interest in participating in the competition again. However, one student was not sure of it. It is interesting to note that none of the respondents replied in the negative. After going through the feedback of the survey, it is quite evident that students have the requisite desire and passion to improve their public speaking skills provided they are mentored and given the congenial atmosphere to harness their talent.

V. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research work was limited to the seven students who took part in the contest and went through the training program. Therefore, there is a need to expand the research net and include more participants. Doing so would certainly add more credibility and vitality to this experimental study which otherwise was perceived to be immensely impactful. Moreover, the study was conducted at Ibra College of Technology in Oman. Therefore, the spatial restrictions are to be considered.

VI. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. The same techniques could be used across the colleges under the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Oman to see how helpful they are in enhancing the public speaking skills of the Omani students.
2. Further techniques could be developed depending upon the level and the needs of the students. Doing so would be extremely useful for the teachers and students. In fact, a collaborative research could be undertaken by different institutions from different countries in order to achieve the same.
3. Different short training programs could be evolved for different kinds of public speaking. To put it in perspective, persuasive speaking requires techniques that are different from humorous speeches.
4. Challenges faced by students could be probed deeply at both the foundation and post-foundation levels.
5. A course book with case studies could be developed based on the research experience and findings.

VII. CONCLUSION

The research findings clearly demonstrated that the C.A.L.L. strategy works well in improving the public speaking skills of the students. The most significant finding is that students would like to have short and target-oriented training programs with well-developed outcomes and techniques. It would be received well if the intended training program is coupled with the competitive spirit. In addition, these short training programs could very well supplement the main course as they give them a clear idea of what should be the necessary ingredients in their speech. All things considered, public speaking skill can be enhanced significantly if appropriate strategies are followed.

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