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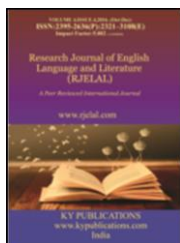
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ORAL PRESENTATION TECHNIQUES-AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR TEACHING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Dr. NOEEN KHALIQ

Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities, University Institute of Technology,
Rajiv Gandhi Proudlyogiki Vishwavidyalaya, Bhopal
e-mail: noeenshamim@gmail.com



ABSTRACT

India, having high demographic dividend has huge potential for grabbing the employment opportunities that rise because of emerging economy. This entails that we have not only trained people but people who can effectively communicate in an International language. English being the lingua franca of the business community and preferred language of "World of Work" requires weightage and focus in all institutions of professional education. Students of engineering colleges constitute a different strata, the challenge here is to communicate effectively. This paper discusses use of presentation skills as an effective tool for teaching communication skill. Students were given task of preparing presentations in different groups on varied topics. The outcome of this technique is highly encouraging and has built up confidence among students with increased ability for understanding problems, enhanced vocabulary, comprehension, public speaking, use of kinesics, visual effects and graphics with added advantage of peer learning, team working and out of box thinking.

Key words: Work place skills, audience characteristics, power point, globally deployable, demographic dividend.

Introduction

Fast pace of change of technology and its global outreach has really shrunk the World. India, having high demographic dividend has high potential for grabbing the employment opportunities that are coming because of emerging economy. By skilling the youth with appropriate skills, the country will not only train manpower for local consumption but can also export it worldwide. This entails that we shall have not only trained people but people who can effectively communicate in International language. English being the lingua franca of the business community and preferred language of "World of Work" requires higher emphasis and focus in all institutions of professional education.

Teaching of English with the aim of improving Communication Skills is a separate domain, which requires special treatment and teachware. Students of engineering courses constitute a different stratum, where the challenge is to communicate effectively. This paper dwells on the use of presentation skills/techniques as an effective tool for teaching communication skills.

Background

In all under graduate programmes of engineering of Rajiv Gandhi Proudlyogiki Vishwavidyalaya, the course on Communication Skills is a credit course and taught in both first and second semester. The course is divided in five units and has a practical component of language laboratory with

five hours of theory and two hours of practical training in the laboratory per week. Besides this, Book Review is also a major component of curriculum. The rationale of the course is to enable the students of engineering to communicate effectively in a business and professional environment. The emphasis is on developing workplace skills in students.

Methodology

The methodology consists of guiding the students to present their knowledge through CAP (Comprehend, Absorb and Practice) technique. Students are given the task of preparing presentations in different groups normally consisting of 5 to 6 students, on a variety of topics ranging from current affairs, new technology to latest electronic gadgets etc. Students are at liberty to decide topics from the list suggested by tutor or else suggest themselves. A criterion for selection of topics is their relevance and its usefulness in their professional life. The task is explained to each group with the basic guiding template for preparation of presentation so that there remains uniformity across all the presentations. This also provides ease of evaluation on a common scale. Normally, a month's time is given for preparation and during the course of preparation; students are encouraged to raise their queries, given directions and suggestions. Students are guided in the three steps presentation process of Planning, Preparing and Performing.

The first step of planning trains them in analyzing, investigating and adapting. While analyzing, the students learn to study their purpose, layout their schedule and profile their audience. Here purpose identification is two fold – General and Specific. While the general purpose trains them to inform, to persuade and to demonstrate; the specific purpose involves them in identifying an observable, measurable action.

An important step of planning is investigation, where participants are made to introspect, recall their personal knowledge and experiences, take interviews of concerned experts and special interest groups, conduct discussions and gather needed information. This information collection cycle involves searching the web, books, journals, multimedia resources, newspapers, articles

etc. This exercise gives them a practical training in Reading skills.

As the final step of planning their presentation, the students are trained to adapt to the occasion, as well to the audience. In order to establish good rapport with the audience, the students are made to identify audience characteristics, analyse their needs and expectations and identify factors for capturing and maintaining audience attention.

With the aim of training students to identify audience characteristics they are taught strategy of Lenny Laskowski, an expert on presentation skills. His use of the word A-U-D-I-E-N-C-E as an acronym is used as a guiding path for students in defining the general audience categories, which are mandatory to be included in their surveys. The acronym is reproduced below:

A_u_dience-Who are the members? How many will be at the event?

U_n_derstandin-What is their knowledge about the topic I will be addressing?

D_e_mographics-What are their age, sex, educational background and so forth?

I_n_terest-Why will they be at this event? Who asked them to be there?

E_n_vironment- Where will I stand when I speak? Will everyone be able to see me?

N_eeds- What are the listener's needs? What are my needs as a speaker? What are the needs of the person who wants me to speak?

C_u stomised- How can I custom fit my message to this audience?

E_xpectations- What do the listeners expect to learn from me?

As a part of dealing with this last part of audience expectations, the students are taught, not to change their ideas or facts for their audience, but to change the way they convey their ideas. This step automatically coaches them in the fundamental principle of communication skills, where how you say is as important as what you say.

After guiding the initial stage of planning, the training of the major step of preparing is imparted, which constitutes organising and composing the write-up of the presentation on one

hand and using visual aids – 2D and 3D on the other hand. The text preparation hones the student's writing skills and the visual preparation brings out their creative and innovative skills. The 3D visual aids may consist of objects, models and people; where as the 2D visual aids consist of drawings, photographs, slides, maps, graphs, charts etc.

As the last stage of completion, students are made to revise and proof read their preparation. Revision includes editing for content, conciseness and clarity. This gives a practical coaching of seven 7 C's (principles) of Communication. Proof reading includes reviewing everything for typing mistakes, improper grammar and mechanical errors. This involves frequent referencing of the dictionary and ends up developing not just student's vocabulary, but also correct use of grammar.

The most exciting is obviously the practical part which includes practice and performing the presentation. This trains the students in delivery, which is a combination of the three Vs – Verbal, Visual and Vocal. The verbal and the vocal gives a practice of right pronunciation and use of voice, which tutors the participants in phonetics (again a part of syllabus) as well as public speaking, use of body language, kinesics (gesture, posture, facial expressions), oculosics (eye movement), etc. Finally, the process of students watching their classmate's presentation and shooting questions at the end is an exercising of their listening skills.

The output of the students is a power point presentation or in any other software. The output contains text, video, films in a soft copy and a hard copy of the same in a file. Each group is asked to present their work in the lab, where classmates, students of other branches, senior faculty and some times the Director is also present to evaluate the work. Assessment criteria includes marks for content, coverage, use of appropriate words, visual impact, time management, understanding of the topic, use of some innovative aids, style, explanation etc. Overall grading gives weightage to each of the component. Power Point presentations are critiqued and improved for further rounds of evaluation. Rather than presentations being greeted with polite applause, students are prepared to occasionally expect interruptions or hostile follow-up questions

from fellow students and teachers. The course serves as a safe place where students can honestly evaluate their public speaking and writing skills and work diligently to improve them. Hence, among diverse learning methodologies, this technique is high on scalability also.

Outcome based learning

The outcome of this technique is highly encouraging and has really built up confidence among students with increased ability for understanding problems, vocabulary, comprehension, working in professional style, right selection of words, use of visual effects, graphics presentation with added advantage of peer learning, team working and out of box thinking. Another major component of this practice involves working with groups in public forums; as such, discussions will include how to plan for and manage presentations in a definite period of time. The exercise gives an opportunity to students to improve their public speaking and presentation skills by practicing them individually and in groups, be able to assess their own speaking skills, and learn from the guidance provided by their peers and tutor. Being exposed to components of a persuasive or otherwise compelling oral presentation, they now know how to make effective use of PowerPoint. They are now more confident in dealing with criticism in a constructive and polite manner.

Conclusion

Presentation technique's advantage is three pronged- training of the verbal, visual and the vocal. It facilitates learning in groups through discussions, improves problem solving skills, use of technology, public speaking, researching etc. and prepares students for the future challenges. It polishes their skills in such a manner that there is outstanding and visible value addition in their personality. This technique acts as a major step towards skilling and creating a globally deployable workforce.

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