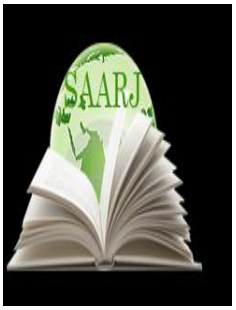

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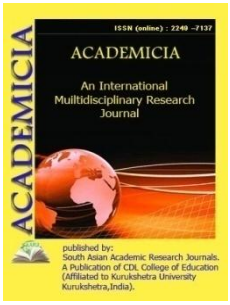

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ENHANCING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY THROUGH ORAL PRESENTATION: A STUDY ON ENGINEERING STUDENTS OF VIGNAN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Language is a tool for communication through which human beings can clearly express their thoughts and ideas. Learners are not an exception from this. Even though most of the students' medium of instruction is English up to graduation level, they struggle to speak English fluently. But when they want a good job and enter corporate world, they need to have good oral fluency including the knowledge of other skills such as reading, writing and listening to deal with the situation at the workplace as well as in their personal life. Unfortunately, majority of them are not able to acquire those skills during their graduation either it is a technical course or non-technical course. The factors for their inefficacy are many from many angles. This study, providing the good opportunities for the students to speak fluently at the college level, investigates that how presentations can help Second B.Tech students of Vignan's University students to improve their speaking skills and also suggests how presentations can be a best source to improve student's oral proficiency at UG level. 35 students were taken as a sample to check with research problem. The findings indicate that presentation has great impact on the students' speaking skills and suggest that speaking skill can be used as a resourceto enhance students' English-speaking abilities and teachers of English can use the presentations as a tool predominantly to improve their students' speaking skills in their day-to-day classrooms.

KEYWORDS: *Acquisition, Communication skill, ESL classrooms, Graduation level, Oral presentations, oral proficiency, Poor speaking skills, Personal needs, Presentation skills, professional needs.*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is meant for sharing information and thoughts or ideas. Communication can be done in two ways: writing and speaking. Speaking is a powerful tool to communicate with people and without which we cannot communicate with one another and hence speaking skills are enormous for learners of any language. An effective speaker can gain the attention of the audience and hold it till the completion of his message. Speaking skills are also important for career success and they play a vital role in our professional life and also personal life. Speaking is a soft skill which is used informally to accomplish everyday tasks. More formally, a verbal presentation is a popular and effective way to help people understand ideas, project, or proposal. To be an effective public speaker, one needs to learn how to use voice, body language and visual aids to capture and hold people's interest" (Butterfield, P. 239). Though the overall development of all four language skills help engineering students to achieve not only their academic excellence but also professional development. Speaking skill is pivotal in terms of getting a job and getting things done in their everyday communicative needs either at home or in academics. Moreover, when it comes to students' job interviews and to be successful in completing their initial rounds in the recruiting process, especially at the final round (HR Round) where students have to showcase their proficiency of speaking. Therefore, students" success in job trials depends on their language competency and the way they communicate in those formal situations. But majority of the students fail to get a good job based as their oral proficiency is minimal and not adequate to meet the demands of the job requirements. Besides, speaking good English gives them good confidence and earn respect for them in the academic context. Unfortunately, most of the students, particularly at UG level, lack communication skills as they have less exposure to English language speaking contexts, less support from the teachers, parents and peers, fear of failure while speaking English, shyness and not recognizing the importance of English language particularly oral skills. Hence, Presentations can support and build confidence and provide tremendous learning opportunities to use language in and outside the classroom.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:

Techeva (2013), opines that communication as master key to the patient's heart and communication is considered to be a key factor for the sick people's problems understanding it is a key for improving students" oral communication abilities. Though this research paper dealt with medical environment, it can be applicable to all other fields too. For that matter, even in the case of engineering students" communication is the key to open up their opportunities in the real world particularly in their professional career.

It is suggested that English lecturers create situations that can encourage learners to improve English oral interactions as such interactions can provide learners with opportunities to explain concepts and help them to vocalize concrete meaning, by vocalizing concrete meaning, learners can lean their tendency towards English oral communication activities.(Rahman,2016, p-193).

Traditional teaching methods limit the learners" communication opportunities. Studies show that students are willing and able to adapt new methods in their learning and keen to follow their

individual interests but they need good guidance from their teachers to make their transition from prior learning practices to the inquisitive and individualistic style of learning. (Elezabeth,2020, p.193). Moreover, the students of this era are equipped with technology innovations, and they are very much associated with mobile phones, laptops, desktops and App-based learning. To land et al 2016identified in their action study that dealt with the Japanese students' project, using mobile videos proved to be effective to improve students' presentation skills if the instructors use them effectively in their English classes.

Research problem:

Most of the students who register for Public Speaking course are unable to speak and present orally in front of their classmates and teachers. Improving students' oral presentation skills is the need of the hour which is the prime concern for the teachers. It is evident that most of the students come from rural or village background cannot speak well though English is the medium of instruction for almost all of them till +2 (Intermediate). Still there is much need that they enhance their English fluency in order to communicate effectively and face day to day situations in their personal and professional life. The reason for their low proficiency seems to be less opportunities to speak English in their schools and colleges; teaching in lecture method and conducting summative tests and giving less priority for listening and speaking skills.

Most of the teachers other than English subject teach them in their L1 only. Besides all these obstacles, they find less encouragement from their peer group both in and outside classroom. All these reasons have made them less confident and considered to be poor at oral proficiency.

To measure their current oral proficiency, presentations were conducted in the first class itself so that all the students registered for the course were asked to present on any of the topic they like. 5 marks were given for each component for all the four components: grammar, vocabulary, fluency and content. Total 20 marks were awarded to assess their oral proficiency and the same evaluation process was taken to measure their end presentations as well.

Research Questions of the study

1. To what extent does the use of oral presentations help learners enhance their speaking skills?
2. Doesoralpresentationprovidelearningopportunitiesforlearners'tobeautonomousand confident?

Research Methodology

To conduct this study, 35students of the regular 2nd B.Tech students (ECE and Food Technology)ofVignan'sUniversitywereconsidered.Theyregisteredforthe course titled Public Speaking which is an elective in the II Year along with other 11 electives like Dance, Music, Yoga, Singing etc. This course aims at improving the students' English proficiency by taking their presentations in each class. The course really provides ample of opportunities for them to improve their presentation skills by choosing their own topics. The participants should speak in front of the other students in order to improve their spoken English. A good number of students registered for this course. Class was conducted every Saturday from 1:55 to 3:45 PM for two consequent hours, having 55 minutes for each hour throughout the semester. In the first class, all 35 students were asked to give their self-introductions to know one another. As an instructor, I gave clear instructions about the programme and how they would go about their presentations in the classes. Every learner must choose his/her own topics on their choice for their

presentations. The interventions went around four months i.e. sixteen to eighteen weeks. The following are the topics that students had been given for their presentations:

1. I don't like/hate crowded places.....
2. I like travelling to new places because.....
3. Shouldn't watch the television....
4. Women are the better managers than the men.....
5. Mobile phone is a boon or bane for the students.....
6. Who is the best inspiration for me in my life and why....
7. What should we do to keep public places clean and green...

   Swatch Bharat is amyth.....
8. The most important things in my life are.....
9. The most inspirational person in my life.....
10. The happiest moment in my student life is.....

Procedure for the presentations:

15 minutes time was given for the students as preparation time to present their talk on the given topic. Each student was called and given three minutes time to complete his/her presentation. Everybody did it. Before the presentation, the following instructions were given:

1. Each student mast speaks at least two minutes on the given topic.
2. They must use their eye contact, gestures body language whenpresenting.

3. When the presentation is going on, other students must listen without talking.

In fact, there is no fixed syllabus curriculum for this course. The instructor can use any material based on the students' level and provide speaking opportunities for the learners. Here any material means reading text, audio, video clips, general topics that can be used for individual presentations as well as for group presentations. Students were also encouraged to use their own resources like videos, newspaper cuttings and YouTube videos of the famous personalities for their presentations.

Evaluation Process:

For testing students" oral skills, a criterion was adopted four components: grammar, vocabulary, fluency and content are the components, and five marks were allotted for each component. Based on students' presentations, marks were awarded (out of 20). At the end of each presentation, individual feedback was shared without hurting their confidence and morale. In fact, feedback was shared in very positive and motivational way which could encourage them to prepare better for their next turn. This feedback really helped them to rectify their semantic and phonological errors instantaneously.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data gathered from the Pre and Post-tests were analysed and presented using Pie-charts in order to comprehend the phenomenon under study. Firstly, pre-test scores were presented and analyzed followed by post-test scores on oral presentation.

Pre-tests cores of the respondents are as follows

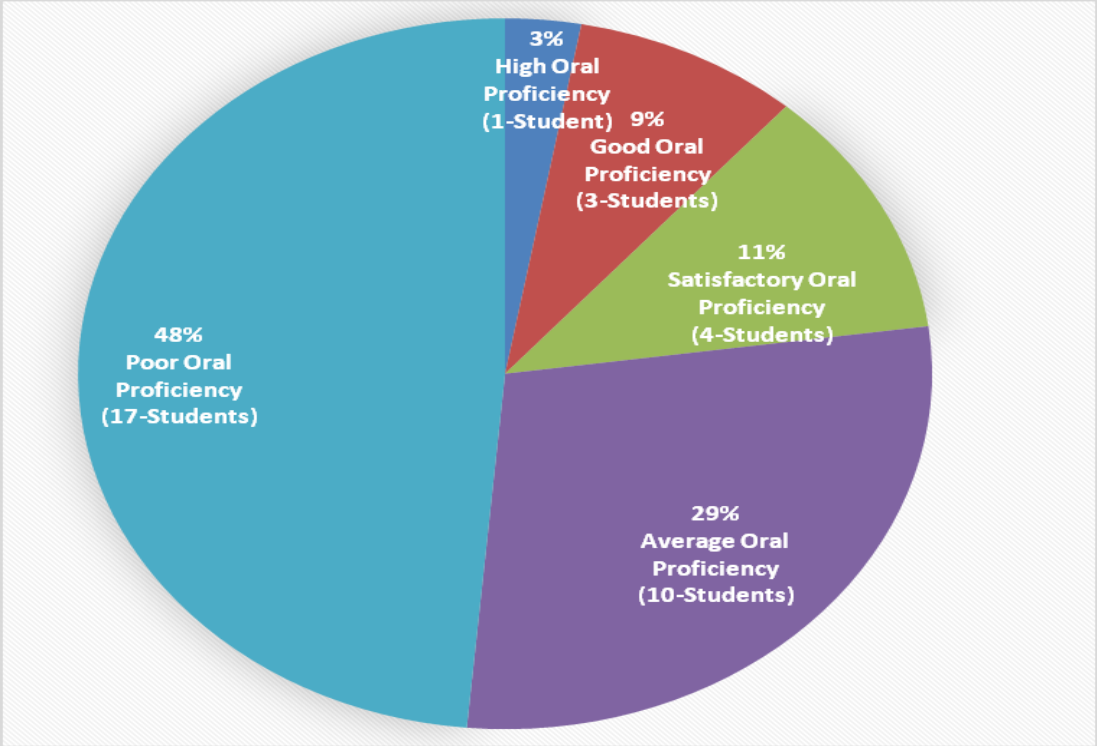
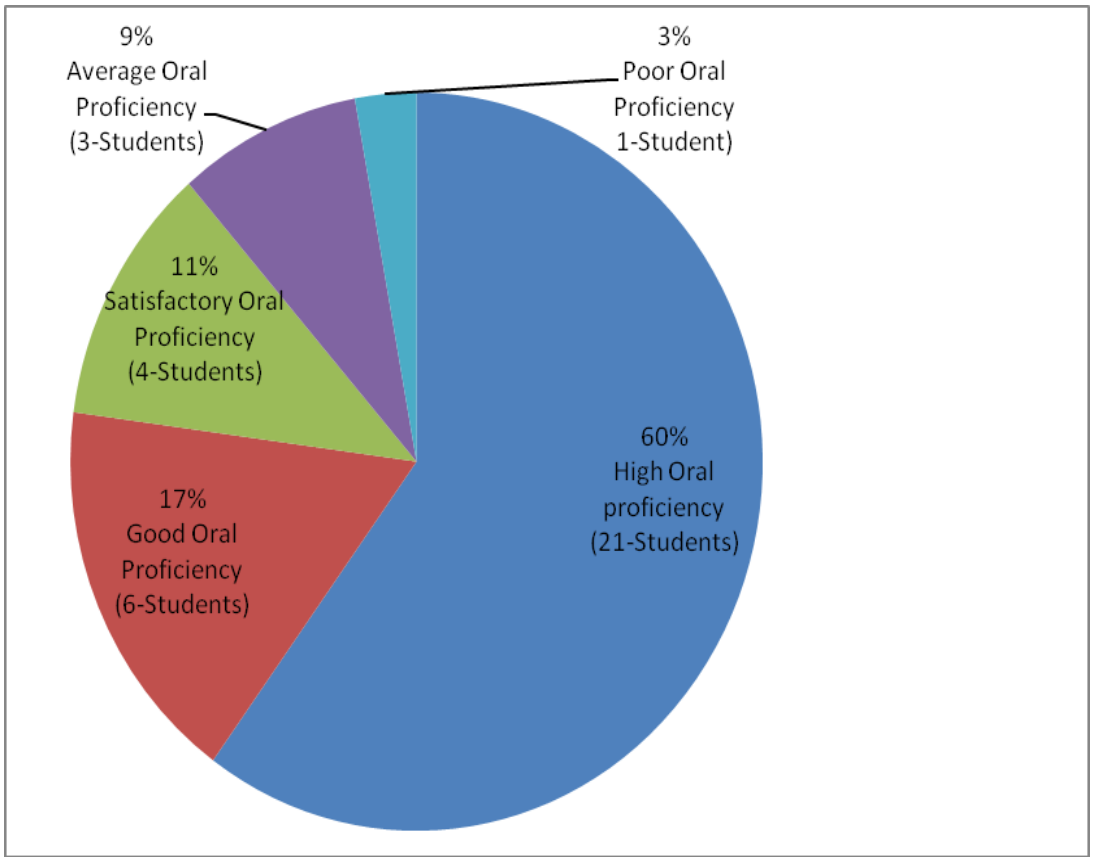


Chart1-Pre-testscores

Pie-chart-1presents the proficiency scores of the respondents obtained in the pre-test. 48% of the students found to have poor oral proficiency while 29% of the subjects were average proficient users of English. Only one respondent had scored around18 marks of 20 which is the smallest percentage in the sample. But 3 respondents scored between 15-17 marks which is an indication that those students seem to be good at oral proficiency.

Therefore, it is evident from the chart that majority of the subjects have very minimal proficiency in English and hence, they can't fulfil their communicative needs and may fail in their job trails as they are not proficient users of English.

Pie Chart-2 Post-test Scores on Oral Proficiency



The pie-chart2 shows the data from the Post-test oral proficiency scores of the respondents. Out of 35 students, 21 students scored 18 marks (60%) on the test. 17% (Six) respondents were seemed to have good oral proficiency while11% (4 students) scored between 11-14 marks.

But, surprisinglyonly3% fell under poor proficiency. Hence, it is obvious that students who scored very less in pre-test had performed in post-test when compared.

It is a clear indication that respondents outperformed in post-test and their proficiency levels seem to have increased after the intervention.

Findings &Discussion

Findings of the study indicate that the intervention has a positive impact on students' English proficiency as it is shown in pre and post-tests scores. It is astonishing that after orientation, 60% students in the study have secured and outperformed in the post-test whereas their scores in pre-test were very low and likely to be considered as poor proficient users of English. Therefore, the intervention that was conducted on presentations had affected the students‟ confidence and stimulated their interest as well. Moreover, their spoken language is relatively good, and they have not shown fear and maintained decent body language too.

One of the major findings of the study is that students who were part of this programme found to be autonomous and in dependent learners because they were given choice to choose their own topics, which in turn could scaffold their improvement. It is also noteworthy that many students showed their interest and individual spoken styles when they were encouraged by the teacher and some students asked the audience many questions at the beginning of their presentation to make their presentation session more active and interactive. Hence, it evident from the study that students can be autonomous learner if certain conditions are provided in the classroom by minimizing teachers' role as mere facilitator. It also informs us that students can get learning opportunities if teacher motivates them. Autonomous learner establishes "a personal agenda for learning" by setting up directions in planning, pacing, monitoring and evaluating the learning process (Little, 1994, cited in Benson, 2007).

CONCLUSION

Presentation skills are paramount in helping students'English proficiency which will enhancetheir verbal and non-verbal communication. It also provides adequate opportunity for learners to improve their speaking skills. Encouraging learners by giving freedom and choice to prepare their own materials enable them towards independent learning there by develop their English proficiency. This study comes out with the recommendations that ESL teachers can use the presentations as tools to provide the platform for their learners to improve their speaking skills. Teachers can give the good amount of time for their students in their regular classes. Then, learners not only improve their speaking skills but also develop a kind of autonomy in their learning style to meet professional and personal language needs in their life.

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