

# USING PUBLIC SPEAKING TO IMPROVE MALAYSIAN STUDENTS' CONFIDENCE LEVEL IN SPEAKING SKILL: A CASE STUDY

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**Abstract:** Public Speaking is one of the ways to improve Malaysian students' confidence level in speaking. This is because the programme offers them the opportunity to improve their confidence level. In this context of study, confidence level was measured by looking at few aspects such as body language, vocal variety, hand gestures, facial expressions and eye contact. The programme focused on friendly environment where mistakes done by participants were pointed out at the end of every performance in order to help them perform better on the following weeks. This study with a case study design was conducted to study the effectiveness of Public Speaking Programme in improving Malaysian students' confidence level. 3 secondary school students from Penang, Malaysia were chosen in this study to participate in the Public Speaking Programme throughout the period of 10 weeks. The students' performances were recorded and were observed by the researcher. The students were also interviewed by the role-player. The interviews were done for four times throughout ten weeks in order to check on the students' level of confidence from time to time. The findings from observation, evaluator's reports, role-players' reports and interview data revealed that all the students improved on their confidence level towards the end of the programme compared to the first week of the programme. The weakest student showed tremendous improvement in terms of body language and the best student managed to present better. Thus, it can be said that with the help of public speaking programme, the students' confidence level had improved after joining the programme.

**Keywords:** Public speaking, confidence, effectiveness.

## Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an initial understanding of the way this research was constructed. It begins with the background of the study which will elaborate the factors that led to its construction followed by the prelude of Malaysian students' background in verbal communication skill. Questions and objectives related to the current study are featured and sequenced by an explanation as to why it is believed that this research is significant. Some related terms will also be introduced and defined to provide supreme understanding of this research throughout different phases. This study focuses on confidence level. Confident, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (1989) is 'having strong belief, firm hope, or certain expectation, feeling positive, fully assured, 'self-reliant' and having no fear of failure. Confidence level varies between people in the same situation and that people have non-uniform

range of confidence in different situations. Thus, someone who is highly confident in a known and recognizable setting, for instance, may lose confidence in an unfamiliar and challenging environment. According to Dureja & Singh (2011), self-confidence is the internal feeling of certainty; it is a feeling of assurance about oneself and the surroundings. It also attributes the sentiment that one is meaningful and valuable. Self-confidence gives one the power to build their dreams as well as being an important element that enables people to create or do certain things spiritedly. Confidence level can be improved through training especially in public speaking. Two of the public speaking programs are called Toastmasters Club and 4-H Public Speaking Program.

### **Background of the study**

The importance and role of the English language cannot be denied as it is used widely in the world of ICT, as well as in educational field and everyday's real life situation. One needs to be competent in the English language and well-versed in spoken English with the corresponding spread of English as a global language. In the Malaysian context, the purpose of the English language is to equip the learners with effective and efficient communications in English for their social and professional situations (Citrawati, 2005). The first language or mother tongue influences the learning of English in either a positive or a negative way as English lessons are formally taught in public schools and most pupils are reasonably proficient in their first language. The interference of the first language is to be expected in such a melting pot of languages and cultures, and teachers must be prepared to choose and make use of suitable and the best teaching methods to go against it. Generally, in shaping students' attitudes towards English, location and background play an important role. Pupils who live in town are exposed to the language as well as more opportunities to use and apply the language in their daily life. In reality, there are many children who use English as their first language as the parents must have chosen to use only English at home instead of their native languages. On the other hand, children who live in rural areas have little exposure to English. These children are only exposed to English through available mediums such as radio or television. Thus, the learning process of English becomes more negative. In the English language classes, teachers have to deal with students' range of abilities as best they can as the students come from different background with varying level of proficiency. The average number of students per classroom is 40 although the number may decrease to as low as 35 or elevate to as high as 45.

In Malaysia, English is a mandatory subject in both primary and secondary schools, and is generally taught in mainstream public schools from the first year of school (year one) until the final year of school (form five/ form six). There are usually five periods of English in a week, totalling to three hours and thirty minutes. There are three major examinations throughout the 11 years of schooling; each examination includes English as one of the core papers. The first is at the end of primary school in Year Six (UPSR or Primary School Evaluation Certificate), the second is at the end of lower secondary in Form Three (PMR or Lower Secondary School Certificate), and the third is at the end of upper secondary in Form Five (SPM or Malaysian School Certificate). After sitting for the final main exam, students may opt to enter Form Six, a two years pre-university programme culminating in the STPM examination (the Higher Malaysian School Certificate), which is the most customary requirement to a university. Other options include continuing education at private colleges or enrolling in one of the many pre-university institutions or matriculation programmes available. Proficiency in English is highly prized in whatever field of interest, and students are mindful that their English grades will

influence the chances of their acceptance into universities. They are also aware that acquiring commendable grade in English greatly boosts the probabilities of admission into both local and foreign universities as well as granting them promising jobs in the future. In addition to mainstream public primary schools, Malaysia has a large number of vernacular primary schools in which lessons are conducted using either Chinese or Tamil as the medium of instruction. In these schools, beginning from Year Four through Year Six, a minimum of one hour English lesson must be taught in a week. (From 2003 onwards, however, English lesson has been introduced in Year One.) Schools are given autonomy to allocate the time for English lesson. Schools can determine to fulfil the requirement or assign more time for English subject. Students are obligated to fulfil an additional year of school focusing on intensive studies of both Bahasa Malaysia and English before they are integrated into the mainstream secondary schools as there is no vernacular secondary school. The year of transition between primary and secondary education is called the Remove Form and this year is compulsory for all students from vernacular primary schools. Some years ago, in an effort to redress the plummeting standards of English, basic requirements for a passing grade in both the PMR and SPM were upgraded, as were the papers themselves. In order to produce a hybrid which was altogether far more challenging than the old model, the SPM 322 examination was conjoined with the Cambridge 1119 "0" Level paper. A few years later, a literature component was added to both papers, including a carefully selected range of poetry and prose to further jumpstart students' interest in the language.

### **Statement of Problem**

Students' negative attitudes towards learning English language are one of the reasons for the deterioration in English Language competency among students. According to Hamidah (1996), research has been done on Universiti Utara Malaysia matriculation students in Learning English. The findings revealed that the attitudes of students towards language and the culture of the English speaking people are negative and similar attitudes can be seen amongst primary and secondary school students. Thus, in general, graduates in Malaysia are without gainful employment due to their shortcomings in communication skills. They are unable to impress employers during interviews, as a result of lack of proficiency in English (Phang, 2006). Many jobs require employees to have excellent communication skill especially public communication as it is essential in presenting recommendations or proposals. Public communication is also imperative in recruiting new employees, development of company, motivation and maintenance of staff (Kelly & Watson, 1989).

Many employers demand people who can speak good English as they require their staff to communicate within international marketplace (Baker & Westrup, 2003). In several countries such as USA, UK, Canada, Australia and South Africa, English is the mother tongue of millions of people. In some countries like India, France and Pakistan, it is their second. English has broken down barriers which segregate people and brought about unity and interdependence among them by being one of the six official languages of the UNO (Benju, 2009). Therefore, by learning to speak English, one can upgrade his education level, profession achievement and economic status. At the same time, one can use their valuable skill to contribute to community and country (Baker & Westrup, 2003). Hence, it is necessary for students to speak good English from young age in order to groom them for favourable future working environment.

### **Aims and Objectives of the Research**

To study on students' confidence level after wrapping up the Public Speaking Programme.

### **Research Questions**

To what extent can public speaking training boost students' level of confidence?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is outlined to investigate whether Public Speaking Programme helps Malaysian students to improve on their confidence level in spoken skills. From this study, the researcher will look at the impact of the programme in helping and encouraging the selected participants to be a better speaker.

It is hoped that if it is proven that Public Speaking Programme can give great impact on students' level of confidence and communication skill, the language teachers in schools can adopt this programme to nurture students and simultaneously refine students' speaking skill.

Recent research shows that Toastmasters club which is a public speaking club in campus offers an enjoyable and pleasant technique to polish communication proficiency and the same time sharpens leadership skill. In Toastmasters club, leadership and public speaking skills can be enriched (Sun, 2008). This programme can be introduced to students in secondary education to tertiary education so as to equip them for future lifework. This module can also develop their potential to be an excellent presenter and competent leader. Therefore, with the skill they have acquired, they will have a better future and turn into successful career person. According to Baldoni (2003), influential words must be used by leaders in order to accomplish their mission. Words themselves are pieces of information. The combination of words and the personal characteristic will bring forth the power to communicate. The ability to interact verbally is a leader's most important tool as it includes the capability to construct message, transmit the message to others, listen to feedback, process the feedback and continue to communicate (Baldoni, 2003).

The technique guided by this programme can help student cultivate interpersonal relationship with the society. Public Speaking programme is a decent place to socialise because there is reciprocally positive feedback between members. Chiang (2001) found that, more than 90 percent of the students considered that they are more informed about their friends from the activity in the club which emphasizes on important communications such as listening to jokes, expressing views and thoughts and sharing experiences among members (Chiang 2001).

### **Limitations of the Study**

In the move to introduce and implement public speaking programme to improve communication skill, there are a number of limitations that teachers must deal with.

This study involves only three students selected from one urban school in Penang and hence they do not represent the whole population of the students in suburban and rural schools in Malaysia. The findings of this research should not be generalized beyond the scopes of chosen participants as different student has different background and exposure towards English language.

Some students might put in extreme efforts into preparing the speech but others might just be moderate. Their preparation will influence their performances. Moreover, the duration of the intervention was limited to only 10 assignments which were carried out on the experimental group over the period of 3 months. If all the participants were given more time to make better preparation, the outcome would be different.

## **Literature Review**

Communication can be divided into two components which are verbal and non-verbal. Verbal communication happens when the message is spoken. Non-verbal communication is a communication that covers the body language, gestures, tone of voice and facial expressions that collaborate with the content of the message (Lindh, Pooler, Tamparo & Dahl, 2009). Social Anthropologist claims that 60% of the public's communication is non-verbal. As affirmed by Bhardwaj (2008), non-verbal communication is a communication that involves body movements, gestures, facial expressions which complement spoken messages. Verderber & Sellnow (2011) agreed and stated that non-verbal communication contain all signals that associate with the message. The signs include eyes, face, gestures, voice and appearance (Verderber & Sellnow, 2011). Non-verbal communication is the first type of communication that one learns since birth. This can be seen when a baby learns to smile. Non-verbal communication is usually used to express feelings and thoughts (Lindh, Pooler, Tamparo & Dahl, 2009). It can also be regarded as a type of communication to indicate spontaneous intuition and emotions (Lewis, 2007).

Experts tell us that 70% of communication is non-verbal. The tone of voice communicates 23% of the message and only 7% of the messages are actually communicated by spoken words (Lindh, Pooler, Tamparo & Dahl, 2009). Scientific analysis in the field of NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) research has found that people communicate in three ways which are 55% with body language, 38% using the tone of voice and 7% in spoken mode. It is said that 93% of message in communication is conveyed by body language including voice (Borg, 2010). Facial expression is considered one of the most important non-verbal communicator (Lindh, Pooler, Tamparo & Dahl, 2009). Facial expression is believed to be an important indicator of our attitudes, state of mind and relationship to others as communication that one participates involves a face to face situation. One can indicate that she is happy or sad through facial expression (Beck, Bennett & Wall, 2002). Each aspect of the face anatomy sends a meaningful non-verbal message. The movement of eyebrow indicates non-verbal cues as well. One can express her feelings such as surprise, puzzled, worry, amused and curious using non-verbal messages reflected by the position of the eyebrow (Lindh, Pooler, Tamparo & Dahl, 2009). Morries (1994) suggests that the two important elements that are closely related to facial gestures are the smile and the frown as these two elements are good indicators of our feelings (Beck, Bennett & Wall, 2002).

Good speakers are speakers that are able to predict and construct the expected designs of specific discourse situations. They must also handle discrete components such as turn-taking, rephrasing, providing feedback, or redirecting (Burns & Joyce, 1997). Good speakers must be able to reply with normal pattern of script using correct vocabulary and emphasize words to clarify the meaning or to enhance the clarity of interaction. The use of facial expressions and body language are also important to indicate feelings and emotions towards the message of the interaction. Other skills that must be dominated by good speakers would be the sounds and intonations of the language in order to stress on the importance of certain messages in the interaction. Besides, good speakers must also be able to pay close attention to rate of speech and grammar structures to help the listeners to achieve great understanding (Brown, 1994).

One of the main factors to promote students' confidence in language learning is the increasing helpful self-conceptions of L2 competence (Dornyei, 2001, p. 130). Students will feel more confident when they gain greater skill as they will be able to speak and will grab every opportunity to speak. Therefore, communication strategies should be discovered in order to

increase students' communicative competence. Other researcher have explored communication strategies (Bygate, 1987; Bialystok, 1990; Charoenchang, 1991; Nimitparat, 1993; Dornyei & Thurrell, 1994; Pattison, 1987; Chatupote, 1990; Luangsaengthong, 2002; Paul, 2003; Tangsriwong, 2003 and Paul 2004). The types of communication strategies include: paraphrase or approximation; borrowing or inventing words; gestures; asking for feedback; reduction; appeal for help; asking for repetition; asking for clarification; interpretive summary; checking; use of fillers/hesitation, using the Thai language and L3-switch.

Confidence level is one of the factors to improve on students' language learning especially speaking (Kelly and Watson, 1986, p. 4). Dornyei (2001) mentioned few ways to promote students' confidence level include offering experience of success, support the learners and reduce anxiety.

Confidence strategies help students improve their confidence level. One confidence strategy is to notify the learner about the learning and performance requirements and assessment criteria. A second confidence strategy is to provide challenging and meaningful chances for successful learning. A third strategy is to connect learning success to their learning process, for instance, giving positive feedback to the learner about his or her efforts to learn.

Public speaking can be construed as delivery of speech to a congregation by a single speaker that can be segment of an academic curriculum or corporate lectures. A number of universities in Malaysia incorporate public speaking in 'co-curriculum' program. Public Speaking coaching can assist particular concept in the speech (Cooper, 1985; Reece, 1999). It is irrefutable that communication proficiency along with public speaking is essential skills that one must acquire in order to succeed. Being competent in public speaking can help college scholars to enhance verbal presentation skill that will be of advantage to them in the long run as they will be more confident when they embark on working life. To ascertain the success of a public speaking program, it is compulsory for the students to be given valid and productive evaluations after each presentation. As mentioned by Quigley and Nyquist (1992), evaluations and constructive criticism will alert the students on the audience's reactions and eventually improve their proficiency in public speaking. The skills that they acquired during public speaking coaching can help them become more confident in sitting for job interviews and cultivating appropriate communication skills. In the present days, proficiency in public speaking can be considered as influential skill as they can boost a person's chance to become successful.

### **Research Design**

This study was designed to analyze the effects of public speaking program in improving students' speaking skills. The speakers presented their speeches based on the manual (guided by the preferred public speaking program). This program had the same mission as the other public speaking program which was to render supportive and positive learning environment, in which each member has the chance to build up oral communication and leadership skills that cultivates self-confidence and personal development. Being a participant in this program means more than simply making a commitment to personal growth as he or she would also be committed to the program, its members and the association entirely. In this program, members learnt by doing and watching fellow club members presenting speeches in order to improve communication and leadership skills. The best phase in a learning process is the preparation and presentation of the speeches based on the tasks in the manual provided. The manual has 10 speeches tasks designed to develop speaking skills progressively. Along the way, students will learn to speak with

confidence, clarity and persuasiveness (Toastmasters, 2009). The research was conducted based on a design involving qualitative approaches. In addition, Price (1991:101) explains that adding a qualitative research would provide descriptive information not easily obtained from quantitative approaches. The qualitative component of the study was adopted to collect and analyze the data from the evaluation forms, interviews and observation. In order to establish the students' level of confidence, each sample was interviewed within the first speech and the tenth speech presentation. The interviews were conducted after the 1st, 4th, 8th and 10th speech respectively. The researcher then compiled the data from all the interviews and analyzed them in order to interpret the effectiveness of the public speaking program. The final stage of the study would be the implications, recommendations and conclusion.

### **Site and sample selection**

This research was conducted in one of government school in Penang. The researcher applied purposive sampling approach to select a number of students as samples to represent the population to be studied. Through this sampling, several essential criteria were determined to ensure their suitability as participants in the research. This idea was supported by Holloway and Wheeler (2010) who stated that the term 'purposive' sampling is used because the sampling units are chosen and selected for a specific reason. As for the selection of participants, the students were picked based on their level of communication skill and English proficiency. They were chosen to represent learners from the low, moderate and high English proficiency levels based on their results in English subject for mid-term test and as well as their teacher's recommendations. All the samples in this study comprised of students in year 2 and year 4 of secondary level in one of the schools in Penang. A number of 8 students were invited to join in the public speaking program but only data from 3 students were analyzed due to inconsistency performance and attendance by the remaining 5 students. The 3 students were evaluated in this study and were selected based on their English test results categorized into 3 levels that are good, intermediate and weak. The subjects presented 10 speeches (one speech per week) throughout the program. There were role players such as timer, grammarian, ah-counter (a person who counted the fillers made by the subjects in their speeches) and evaluators that evaluated their speeches as a whole based on the evaluation form from the manuals. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from the role players and the researcher then analyzed and interpreted the data collected.

### **Research Instruments**

Seven instruments: i) Public speaking manual, ii) speech evaluation form, iii) observation form, iv) interview questions, v) reports from role players (timer, grammarian and evaluators), vi) video recording.

### **Public speaking manual**

The set of ten assignments is the main instrument in this module. The manual of the program (guided by the public speaking program foretasted) is an essential tool for learning and enhancing public speaking skill. Each task is designed with individual objectives to be achieved by speakers and each task is at different level of difficulty. Hence, it is important for speakers to present their speeches in numerical order. The manual is one of the most vital tools for this research as respondents will be adhering to this manual as a guide in presenting the 10 tasks. The module has been validated by the expert's recommendation.

The students activated the program with “Self-introduction” speech. Since it was their first speech, the students spoke on an elementary topic which was about them. In the following speeches, they focused on content organization as it could help the audience grasp and understand the speeches presented. Next, the participants concentrate on main points, word usage, body language, vocal variety, topic research, and handling power point confidently. Towards the end of the program, they ended with difficult tasks as they mastered many skills by now. As for task 9, respondents were required to show the skills they have learnt from the previous speeches. With respect to task 10, the students were required to present impromptu speeches using all the skills they have acquired from task 1 to task 9 including coordinating the content of the speech, arranging the main points and the supporting points, applying the correct words to suit the idea presented, employing the body language to emphasize certain points, exerting vocal variety to stress on important points and to explore the topic presented.

### **Analysis**

In executing the data analysis, the process was performed by referring to the steps suggested by Cresswell (2003). Firstly, in organising and preparing the data for data analysis, the researcher was to read and understand the role-players’ report and transcribed the interview followed by data analysis process where the researcher read through all the data obtained from the role-players’ reports and interviews.

As for observation, the analysis involved reviewing the checklist as well as the recorded video. Thus, the researcher described and discussed the observation and later triangulates the findings with those from the interview and document mining. The reliability and validity of the criteria used to measure students’ confidence level was ensured as the researcher employed professional evaluator and observer.

In this study, the researcher analyzed and interpreted the qualitative data according to the role players’ report and students’ responses from the interview sessions which was conducted before and after the program. She then summarized the data based on components such as the time taken by presenters to present their speeches, pronunciation, body language, facial expression, vocal variety and hand gestures when presenting the speeches. These components are crucial components that will determine if their confidence levels in speaking skills have been improved gradually. According to Holloway (1997), in order to explore the samples’ behavior, perspectives, and experiences, the researcher should use the qualitative approach.

Four methods were used. Firstly, the researcher observed the students’ presentation based on checklist on how they presented their speeches and the way they spoke. A video recording was done in order to monitor students’ confidence level in their presentation from time to time. Secondly, the researcher interviewed the students involved in between 10 weeks of the study to assess their communication skills after joining the public speaking program. Lastly, the researcher will analyze the document which consists of reports from role players such as timer and evaluator.

Overall, after all the data were collected, the researcher triangulated the data and categorized them into five themes which are certainty, uneasiness, performance, feelings and avoidance. The purpose of these themes is to enable the readers to comprehend and get clearer picture on how each component related to each other in this study. The researcher was guided by Anxiety-Enthusiasm Behaviour Scale by Porhola (1997).

### **Discussion and conclusion based on research findings**

Based on the findings in chapter 4, the researcher realized that all the three students showed positive characteristics from time to time. For instance, they managed to look at the audience reasonably towards the end of the program. Besides that, the students also exhibited good facial expressions to suit the message in their speeches. As for the hand gestures, student C showed tremendous improvement. For example, for the first 2 weeks, she made unnecessary movements such as frequently adjusting her school uniform during her presentation. However, after presenting five speeches, she managed to use numerous types of hand gestures to reinforce the message of her speech. The characteristic of long pauses between words indicates that a person is experiencing memory lapses, inability to recall points in speech and facing difficulties in performing the speech. Based on the observation, as the program advanced to the end, all the three students managed to speak with no long pauses between words as they were able to remember the points and were more confident when they performed. The three students positively reported that they could perform confidently after joining the public speaking program. Hence, these findings further confirmed the implementation of public speaking programme has successfully elevated the students' level of confidence in speaking skill to a significant extent.

### **Conclusion**

Public Speaking Programme may have a positive impact on student's level of confidence in speaking skill as well as fluency in speaking. It is essential to focus on confidence level in speaking as students can easily find jobs and succeed in their life in future.

Although improving students' confidence level is not easy and time consuming, confidence level is very important and students' can achieve greater success with high level of confidence. Previous studies also have revealed that the level of confidence can be improved using public speaking programme. The result of this study also indicated that students' confidence level in speaking can be improved by using the programme. So, the researcher hopes that all parties and educators would focus more on improving students' level of confidence using public speaking programme.

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