

Integrating Task-Based Blended Learning Approach in Teaching Public Speaking

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Highlights: Public speaking is a sustained formal presentation made to an audience. For the English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, practice enables them to identify and address speech-related concerns prior to delivery. As such, it is highly encouraged for the students to engage in practice to promote skills training. In skills training for public speaking, the speech planning process is divided into specific skills that can be mastered, first, in isolation, and then together. Task-based instruction is an ideal tool for implementing the principle of skills training especially with the use of technology. Thus, there is potential for employing task-based approach for public speaking in a blended learning environment.

Key words: *Blended learning; Communication; ESL; Public speaking; Skills training; Task-based approach.*

Introduction

The task-based public speaking model in a blended learning environment (refer figure 1) is a model of a public speaking learning process specifically in the speech preparation process using task-based approach in a blended learning environment. The model includes different types of tasks the students are assigned during the preparation process, and the tools they use in completing the tasks. It highlights the integration of tools for students' collaborative and self-access activities, and the face-to-face (F-T-F) time spent with the instructor. This model also demonstrates how the blended learning environment (i.e. student exposure and involvement in technology-based tools and platforms namely Wikispace and YouTube) allows for feedback from instructor and peers, self-paced learning on the part of the students, and integration of various teaching and learning approaches on the part of the students (Farahiza Zaihan, 2010; Stodel et al., 2006). With public speaking being the most feared communication situation, application of this model would assist learners to reduce their communication anxiety. This model therefore aims to expose students in a self-discovery learning process while encouraging teachers to be creative in their teaching approaches.

Public speaking is commonly defined as a sustained formal presentation made to an audience. It is an activity involving mental and physical presentations and an effective speaker requires physical coordination, mental concentration, content organization and skills practice (Fujishin, 2009). For the ESL learners, performing a task in front of the class increases the communicative stress, and is predicted to lead to a reduction in fluency and complexity. Ellis (2003) proposes that ESL learners' problems in production may be reduced if they are given time to plan before they begin to speak. Nation and Newton (2009) suggest that because formal speaking, such as giving a speech in class, involves long turns, learners need to be aware of ways to plan the time they are given to speak. When teaching students to make oral presentations or to give speeches, it is important for the instructor to provide opportunities for the students to practice giving prepared, extended presentations or speeches in class.

Practice enables individuals to identify and address speech-related problems or concerns prior to delivery. Experts recommend that in order to improve performance in public speaking, the practice sessions must be as realistic as possible (Sprague & Stuart, 2005). Smith and Frymier (2006) emphasize that since realistic practice develops skills, practicing before an audience, which is relatively realistic practice, seems more effective than practice methods which do not involve audience. As such, it is highly encouraged for the students to engage in public speaking practice in a real context as it promotes skills training. Skills training is based on the simple principle that the better one knows how to do something, the less anxious one will feel about doing it (Sprague & Stuart, 2005). In skills training for public speaking, the speech planning process is divided into specific skills that can be mastered, first, in isolation, and then together.

Task-based instruction is an ideal tool for implementing the principle of skills training. For example, research has shown that task-based pair and group activities promote students' greater involvement in the learning processes and simultaneously support instructors' monitoring as well as encourage feedback by peers and instructors (Bygate, 2015). Similarly, it has been acknowledged that task-based instruction provides opportunities for learner-initiated learning outside the classrooms, thus encouraging greater learner improvements. Therefore, there is a potential for employing task-based approach in public speaking classroom in a blended learning environment.

This model is advantageous in terms of supporting the Malaysian Education Blueprint (Higher Education) shift number 9 in which towards achieving a globalized online education and the promotion of multi-disciplinary approaches to learning (i.e. online learning and face-to-face). Such learning experience is able to prepare students in facing the globalized workforce. By mediating teacher-student and student-student interactions for effective task-based blended learning experience, and providing students with continuous support, assessment and learning experience through web 2.0, this model supports the global efforts towards online education which can be beneficial for all educational institutions and marketed as training and services.

Figure 1. The task-based public speaking model in a blended learning environment

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