

PODCASTING AS A TOOL IN THE DEVELOPMENT
OF PUBLIC SPEAKING SKILLS

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study employed the quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest nonequivalent control group design to investigate the effects of podcasting in reducing anxiety and improving public speaking skills of ESL learners. Eighty-two students were involved in the study. They were enrolled in the fifth semester of the Bachelor in Civil Engineering program at Universiti Malaysia Pahang. This sample was divided into three groups. Two groups were subjected to experimental treatment, and one group was assigned as the control group. The Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) was administered as the pre-test and post-test to measure the students' level of anxiety pertaining to public speaking. The Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form (CSSEF) was used as an instrument to measure the students' public speaking performance at pre-test and post-test. Students' attitude and perceptions on the use of podcasting in the public speaking class were explored using a questionnaire survey, and augmented with observations, group interviews and examination of the entries made in their respective websites. The overall PRPSA scores revealed that the students in all three groups demonstrated a significant reduction in their anxiety level, from pre-test to post-test. Pairwise comparisons between groups revealed that there was no significant difference between the groups. Similar results were obtained with the CSSEF, where the students in all three groups made significant improvements in their public speaking performance. Again, pairwise comparisons between groups revealed that there was no significant difference between the groups. However, at post-test, the experimental group demonstrated a negative correlation between speech performance and speech anxiety, where students' speech performance improved as their level of anxiety decreased. A similar relationship between the two variables was not evident in the control group. Further investigations revealed that although the students in the experimental groups agreed that podcasting should be incorporated in future public speaking classes, they faced technical-related difficulties such as inconsistent speed and intermittent access to the Internet during the study, thus the "anytime, anywhere" maxim for podcasting was not applicable in this situation.

خلاصة البحث

تستخدم هذه الدراسة المنهج شبه التجريبي، وذلك بإعداد مجموعة تحكم لفحص الآثار الناتجة من البث الإذاعي في الحد من القلق، وتحسين مهارات الخطابة لدى متعلمي الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة ثانية، وذلك باستخدام الاختبار القبلي، والاختبار البعدي. شارك في الدراسة اثنان وثمانون طالباً، كانوا قد سجلوا في الفصل الدراسي الخامس، في الدرجة الجامعية الأولى في برنامج الهندسة المدنية في الجامعة الماليزية بيهانج. وتم تقسيم المشاركين في الدراسة إلى ثلاث مجموعات؛ وخضعت مجموعتان للتجربة، بينما بقيت المجموعة الثالثة تمثل مجموعة التحكم، وتم استخدام معيار قياس القلق الفردي في الخطابة؛ بوصفه اختباراً قبلياً، واختباراً بعدياً لقياس مستوى القلق في الخطابة كما تم استخدام استمارة قياس الكفاءة في الكلام بوصفها أداة لقياس أداء الطلاب في الاختبارين القبلي، والبعدي. ومن ثمّ تم التعرف على إدراك الطلاب، واتجاهاتهم في استخدام البث الإذاعي في الخطابة عن طريق الاستبيان المسحي، ودمج الاستبيان بالملاحظة، والمقابلة الجماعية، وتم فحص مداخلهم في مواقعهم الخاصة بهم في الإنترنت. وإجمالاً فقد كشفت درجات معيار قياس القلق الفردي في الخطابة أن الطلاب في المجموعات الثلاثة أظهروا انخفاضاً كبيراً في مستوى قلقهم وذلك من خلال الاختبارين القبلي، والبعدي. وأظهرت المقارنة الزوجية بين المجموعات عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة بين المجموعات. وتم الحصول على نتائج متشابهة كذلك من استمارة قياس الكفاءة في الكلام، حيث أظهر الطلاب من جميع المجموعات تحسناً كبيراً في الخطابة، كما أظهرت المقارنة الزوجية بين المجموعات عدم وجود فروق فردية بين المجموعات مرةً أخرى. ومع ذلك، فقد أظهرت إحدى مجموعتي التجربة في الاختبار القبلي علاقة سالبة بين الأداء في التعبير، والقلق، حيث تحسن أداء الطلاب في التعبير، وانخفض مستوى القلق، ولا توجد علاقة متشابهة بين المتغيرين في مجموعة التحكم. وبالرغم من أن الطلاب في مجموعات الاختبار وافقوا على ضرورة إدراج البث الإذاعي في فصول الخطابة، إلا أن الدراسة أظهرت أنهم يواجهون صعوبات فنية مثل تقطع الإنترنت، وعدم انتظام سرعتها، في كل وقت، وكل مكان أثناء الدراسة، مما لا يمكن من انسياب البث الإذاعي، ويجعله غير صالح للتطبيق في تدريس الخطابة في هذه الحالة.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study looks into the effects of podcasting on students' public speaking anxiety level and their speech performance. The development of a variety of easy-to-use Internet publishing tools, such as podcasting, is recently evident (Richardson, 2009). These tools are changing the way people, including learners at all levels, interact with the world (Solomon & Schrum, 2007). Learning has become more personal, yet at the same time more connected to the surroundings, and with more potential for connected and collaborative activities among learners (Kukulsak-Hulme & Traxler, 2007).

Web 2.0 technologies encompass the new and emerging Web-based tools, expanding on the effects of network technology (Musser, 2006). Most of these tools are free and available to anyone with a browser and Internet connection. Web 2.0 applications include blogs, wikis, RSS feeds and podcasts. Of these applications, podcast is one application that incorporates the creation and publication of audio files, and podcasts have evolved into a tool with usages ranging from entertainment to education, for public purposes such as disaster preparedness to personal purposes such as in weight loss programs (Dale & Pymm, 2009; Fernandez, Simo, & Sallan, 2009; Turner-McGrievy, 2009).

In education, various studies have been conducted to investigate the effectiveness of podcasting in disseminating recorded lectures and discussions (Chan, Lee & McLoughlin, 2006; Flanagan & Calandra, 2005; Maag, 2006; Tynan & Colbran, 2006). Overall, the results indicated that participants of the studies reported

favourably on the use of podcasts. Podcasts have also been used for learning and motivation with at-risk high school students in the United States (Checo, 2007). The results of the study revealed that the students in the podcast group made significant improvements in listening comprehension skills. In language classrooms, podcasts have been used either as a form of input for listening skills, or as output for speaking skills (Anzai, 2007; Fox, 2008). However, research that focuses on the use of podcasting in English as a Second Language (ESL) public speaking classroom is scarce. This study investigated the effects of podcasting on ESL students' anxiety level and speech performance in a public speaking class. Challenges faced by the ESL learners in acquiring speaking skills, particularly public speaking skills, have compelled researchers to find ways to assist learners in overcoming these obstacles (Ahlfeldt, 2004; Cantwell, 2005; De Grez, Valcke & Roozen, 2009; Rojo-Laurilla, 2007; Sun, 2008).

1.1 THE ESL LEARNER AND PUBLIC SPEAKING

In most ESL classrooms, the instructors are often faced with the daunting task of getting the learners to overcome their shyness to speak in the target language (Nunan, 1999). Burns and Joyce (1997) identified three major factors that could contribute to this, which are cultural factors, linguistic factors, and psychological or affective factors. Throughout the years, language practitioners and researchers have focused on anxiety stemming from affective factors, offering a variety of resolutions to the problem (Brown, 1994; Candlin, 1987; Nunan, 1999).

Anxiety, often linked to feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension or worry, affects the ESL learners significantly (Candlin, 1987; Ellis, 2003). Three components of language anxiety in a second or foreign language context

are communication apprehension, fear of negative social evaluation, and test anxiety (Brown, 1994).

For the ESL learners, performing a task in front of the class increases their communicative stress, and is predicted to lead to a reduction in fluency and complexity (Candlin, 1987). Sun (2008) postulated that public speaking anxiety for ESL/EFL learners is even worse because the speeches have to be given in a foreign language. Ellis (2003) suggested that ESL learners' problems in production may be eased if they are given time to plan before they begin to speak. Accordingly, Nunan (1999) proposed that when teaching students to make oral presentations or to give speeches, it is important for the instructor to provide opportunities for them to practice giving prepared, extended presentations or speeches in class.

To facilitate adequate practice opportunities, this study proposes the use of podcasting in speech practice, in order to reduce speech anxiety and improve speech performance.

1.2 COMPETENCE IN PUBLIC SPEAKING

Public speaking is defined as "a sustained formal presentation made by a speaker to an audience" (Sellnow, 2005: 10). According to Fujishin (2009), it is an activity involving mental and physical presentations which are different from social conversational skills. An effective speaker requires physical coordination, mental concentration, content organization and skills practice, and a great deal of experience.

One of the most often cited challenges to mastering public speaking skills is public speaking anxiety (De Vito, 2009; Dwyer, 2005; Fujishin, 2009; Jaffe, 2004; Morreale et al., 2001; Sellnow, 2005; Sprague & Stuart, 2005; Wood, 2004), also commonly referred to as public speaking apprehension. This type of apprehension

falls under the category of context-based communication apprehension. Pribyl, Keaten and Sakamoto (2001) asserted that public speaking anxiety may result from several causes, such as perceived lack of public speaking skills, and emotional predispositions towards public speaking.

Researchers and scholars have postulated that some of the main methods for reducing public speaking anxiety include systematic desensitization, cognitive restructuring, and skills training (Dwyer, 2005; Jaffe, 2001; Morreale et al., 2001; Richmond & McCroskey, 1998; Sellnow, 2005; Sprague & Stuart, 2005). Richmond and McCroskey (1998) suggested that skills training is constructive if the individual's high apprehension concerns only one type of communication context, for instance, public speaking, and the said individual lacks skills in that area.

A number of studies have been done to investigate the impact of different approaches in method of instruction in developing public speaking skills and reducing speech anxiety (Ahlfeldt, 2004; Cantwell, 2005; De Grez et al., 2009). Nevertheless, regardless of the approach, public speaking scholars agree that practice is essential in reducing speech anxiety and developing public speaking skills (Byers & Weber, 1995; Daly, Vangelisti, Neel, & Cavanaugh, 1989; DeVito, 2009; Fujishin, 2009; O'Hair, Stewart, & Rubenstein, 2001; Pelias, 1989; Smith & Frymier, 2006).

Practice enables individuals to identify and address speech-related problems or concerns prior to delivery (O'Hair et al., 2001). In fact, it is "one of the most important factors in confident speaking for speakers at all levels of experience" (Fujishin, 2009; 25). Nonetheless, experts recommend that in order to improve performance in public speaking, the practice sessions must be as realistic as possible (Menzel & Carrell, 1994; Sprague & Stuart, 2005). Smith and Frymier (2006) emphasised 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. Not many studies have specifically addressed the issue of providing realistic or authentic practice for ESL learners in a public speaking class. Thus this study explores the effects of podcasting on anxiety and performance, when it is used as a tool to provide learners with opportunities for authentic practice in a public speaking classroom.

1.3 PODCASTING IN PUBLIC SPEAKING

Podcasts are digital audio programs that can be subscribed to and downloaded by listeners via RSS (Really Simple Syndication). RSS feeds enable learning objects such as podcasts to be transferred to mobile devices like an iPod, or downloaded onto a computer (Dale & Pymm, 2009). These RSS files are created by content publishers, and then delivered to people who have subscribed to that feed (Kaplan-Leiserson, 2004). In other words, RSS technology allows podcast contents to be syndicated instantly on the World Wide Web for download and use by anyone who is interested in it (Farkas, 2006).

In education, podcasting has been used primarily for disseminating recorded lectures and discussions (Chan et al., 2006; Dale & Pymm, 2009; Maag, 2006; Tynan & Colbran, 2006). Among American universities that have implemented podcasting at an institutional level are Duke University, University of California at Berkeley, Princeton University and Stanford University (Fernandez et al., 2009).

Although most applications of podcasting in educational settings have involved dissemination of recorded lectures and discussions, students could also create audio projects to share with fellow students, and eventually with the instructor. Podcasting could also be an effective tool for practice or rehearsal (Sze, 2006), in the

public speaking classroom, providing students with the opportunities to review their speeches, and also to broadcast their speeches to a broader range of audience. Thus the speech preparation process becomes more real, in comparison to the process of preparing speeches to be delivered in the classroom, with only peers and the instructor as the “audience”. In other words, podcasting enables the learners to have realistic practice sessions, as recommended by the experts (Menzel & Carrell, 1994; Sprague & Stuart, 2005).

1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Numerous studies have investigated communication apprehension in general. Specific focus has been given to public speaking anxiety, and the associated treatment methods (Ayres, Hopf & Will, 2000; Blood, Blood, Tellis & Gabel, 2001; Garcia-Leal, Parente, Del-Ben, Guimaraes, Moreira, Elias & Graeff, 2005; Merritt, Richards & Davis, 2001; Safren, Heimberg, Horner, Juster, Schneir & Liebowitz, 1999; Sawyer & Behnke, 2002). Other studies also include apprehension in accounting students (Aly & Islam, 2003; Hassall, Joyce, Ottewill, Arquero & Donoso, 2000; Simons, Higgins & Lowe, 1995), apprehension among medical students (Lang, Rowand-Morin & Coe, 1998), and a multinational perspective of communication apprehension among salespersons (Pitt, Berthon & Jobson, 2000).

The earlier studies mentioned above have mostly focused on the apprehension level, and in some, on ways to reduce it. More recently, however, researchers have started to compare different approaches in the method of instruction for a public speaking course, and the subsequent impacts on anxiety level and speech performance (Ahlfeldt, 2004; Cantwell, 2005; De Grez et al., 2009). Nevertheless, little has been done to study the impact of technological tools in reducing public speaking anxiety

and improving public speaking performance. Rapid technological advancements, particularly the proliferation of information and communication technology (ICT), makes it imperative to examine how a web-based tool, specifically, podcasting, affects teaching and learning in a public speaking classroom. This study explores students' use of podcasting in speech practice activities, and its subsequent impact on their anxiety level and speech performance.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In general, the main objective of this study is to investigate the effects of podcasting on students' anxiety level and speech performance. The specific objectives of this study are to:-

1. examine the effect(s) of podcasting on speech anxiety;
2. investigate the effect(s) of podcasting on speech performance;
3. examine any correlation between anxiety and speech performance and
4. investigate students' perception of the use of podcasting in teaching public speaking skills.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Does podcasting significantly reduce students' public speaking anxiety?
2. Does podcasting significantly improve students' performance in public speaking?
3. Is there any correlation between public speaking anxiety and public speaking performance?

4. How do students perceive the use of podcasting in developing public speaking skills?

1.7 METHODOLOGY

This study employed the quasi-experimental, pre-test post-test nonequivalent control group design. The subjects comprised third year students of the Faculty of Civil Engineering at Universiti Malaysia Pahang. These students were enrolled in a fourth level English language and communication course, English for Professional Communication (UHL 3112). Three groups of students were involved, with two groups subjected to experimental treatment, and one assigned as the control group. To reduce threats to internal validity due to teacher variable, the researcher was the instructor for all three groups.

The course proceeded as per stipulated weekly schedule in the course outline. All input materials used were the same for both the control and the experimental groups. Nevertheless, the mode of delivery differed. For the control group, classes were conducted face-to-face, with the instructor giving input via lectures, and facilitating the students' work in class. On the other hand, face-to-face and online approaches, specifically podcasting, were used with students in the experimental groups.

The students were given pre and post Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) (Richmond & McCroskey, 1998) to determine changes in their anxiety level. This is a widely used instrument to measure anxiety in a public speaking context. The alpha reliability for the PRPSA is 0.94 (McCroskey, 1970). The alpha reliability of the instrument calculated for this study is 0.90.

Their pre and post speeches were rated by two independent raters, using The Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form (Morreale et al., 2007). The Competent Speaker assessment instrument was designed to evaluate specific public speaking skills, focusing on the assessment of verbal and nonverbal behaviors of competent speakers, as opposed to knowledge about, or motivation to engage in public speaking. Thus, it is an appropriate instrument for this study, as the public speaking module in this study focused on skills development in becoming a competent speaker, rather than knowledge of public speaking.

A background questionnaire was given to those in the experimental group, to obtain demographic data and information pertaining to their podcasting activities. The blog and comment sections of their individual sites were also analysed. Open-ended group interviews were carried out after the module and the final speech evaluation were completed, where students from both the experimental and control groups were interviewed. Data was also elicited from secondary sources, such as relevant university documents.

Various data elicitation techniques were used to probe into different sources of information, where the experimental findings were checked against evidence from other sources (Gorard, 2001). The adoption of triangulation augments the reliability and validity of the study (Gay & Airasian, 2003; Wiersma, 2000).

1.8 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Kolej Universiti Kejuruteraan dan Teknologi Malaysia (KUKTEM) or University College of Engineering and Technology Malaysia was established on 16th February 2002 under the Malaysian University and University College Act 1970. Five years later, on 1st February 2007, the name was changed to Universiti Malaysia Pahang

(UMP). The university offers both undergraduate and postgraduate programs in various areas of engineering, such as Chemical, Mechanical, Civil and Electrical; and also programs in Computer Science.

1.8.1 Regulating bodies in Malaysian Higher Education

Higher education in Malaysia is regulated by several bodies. At the Ministry for Higher Education (MOHE), the Department of Higher Education is responsible for planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies, programmes and activities of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) towards attaining excellence in higher education (<http://jpt.mohe.gov.my>). This department has included teaching and learning (T&L) as one of its Critical Agenda Projects (CAPs). Under this agenda, the goal of the T&L process is to produce graduates who are able to engage in critical thinking, possess effective communication and English language skills, and are adept with ICT.

The national Engineering Accreditation Council (EAC) led by the Board of Engineers, Malaysia (BEM) instructed all engineering programmes in Malaysia to adopt the outcome-based education (OBE) curriculum in 2004 (Shahrir Abdullah et al., 2009). One of the benefits of OBE is that it is able to measure what the students are capable of performing, and this goes much deeper at a cognitive level than in traditional education systems (Sekhar et al., 2008). OBE enables students to demonstrate his or her skills through more challenging tasks like designing and project building. They could also engage in analysis and synthesis and apply it to problem solving. The students could also utilize their peers' resources in the process of problem solving. Thus, OBE involves students in a complete course of learning, from developing their skills in designing to completing a whole process (Spady, 1994;

Spady, 1995). The adoption of OBE is part of the requirement for BEM to be a full member of the Washington Accord. The advantage of being a full member of the Washington Accord is the degree produced by member institutions would be recognised by fellow members, such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and South Africa. Subsequently, graduates of member institutions would be qualified to work in member countries.

In Malaysia, all engineering programmes are evaluated and accredited by the EAC according to the guidelines issued (refer to the Engineering Programme Accreditation Manual). At the same time, all educational programmes offered by public and private higher learning institutions in Malaysia are also governed by the quality assurance policy set by the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA), as directed by the Ministry of Higher Education (refer to the Code of Practice for Institutional Audit, MQA, 2008).

The undergraduate engineering programs at UMP adhere to the requirements set by the Department of Higher Education, MOHE, and those set by the Engineering Accreditation Council (EAC). Of the program curriculum, approximating 120 credits, 80% is allocated to technical subjects and 20% to the humanities and social sciences. Thus, the graduates are not only equipped with technical knowledge and skills, but also with soft skills.

1.8.2 The Language and Communication Curriculum at UMP

The implementation of OBE in the engineering education in Malaysia has been initiated and driven by the Quality Assurance Department, Ministry of Higher Education (<http://www.mohe.gov.my>). It is an essential requirement for all universities in Malaysia. Due to this requirement, all courses (including Language and

Communication courses) offered in an engineering programme must abide by the principles of OBE.

At UMP, in the engineering programmes, from the twenty-four credits given to the humanities and social science subjects, eight credits are allocated for English language and communication. These credits are distributed into four levels, with each level being assigned two credits.

English for Academic Communication (UHL 1112) course aims to equip students with the various skills needed for academic success, such as skimming and scanning skills, note-taking and note-making techniques and some fundamentals of listening skills. The students are also exposed to the basics of writing and are taught a logical, step-by-step process for conducting and participating in small group discussions and certain aspects of presentation skills. Self-access activities, utilizing language software, are also introduced as part of the course. English for Technical Communication (UHL 1122) is the second course in the Language and Communication series. The course is designed to provide students with a step-by-step guide to mastering the skills of technical writing, report writing as well as oral presentation. The third course is English for Business Communication (UHL 2112). The course primarily aims to help students understand the principles of effective communication skills involved in routine business writing and job interviews.

English for Academic Communication (UHL 1112), English for Technical Communication (UHL 1122), and English for Business Communication (UHL 2112) are common courses to all the undergraduate programs in UMP, both at diploma and degree levels. The fourth course, English for Professional Communication (UHL 3112) is obligatory only for the degree students. The course incorporates three modules, namely, public speaking skills, meeting skills and principles of effective

communication. In the public speaking module, one of the objectives in the outcome-based curriculum, is for students to be able to “*deliver an informative speech of between 5-6 minutes*” (refer to Appendix F for the course objectives). In this module, the following are covered: types and purposes of speeches, methods of delivery, and preparing, organizing, writing and delivering a speech. Due to the short duration of the module for public speaking, the students may not have sufficient opportunities for practice in giving a speech. The audience is also limited only to their classmates and the class instructor. This is in contrast to suggestions by experts (Menzel and Carrell, 1994 and Sprague and Stuart, 2005) who recommended that in order to improve performance in public speaking, the practice sessions must be as realistic as possible.

Unlike conventional classes (face-to-face), with podcasting, the students could podcast their practiced speeches, hence making these speeches available to a wide range of audience, anywhere in the world where there is Internet connection. Thus it could be assumed that the practice sessions would be real, as the speakers have the opportunity to reach real audience.

Teaching materials for the module are developed in-house, and sourced from textbooks, language teaching software and the Internet. These materials are reviewed periodically, in order to keep up with the ever evolving teaching and learning environment.

1.8.3 Facilities at UMP

The university provides a wide range of facilities for its staff and students. To support the application-oriented curriculum, which integrates theory and practice, the engineering laboratories are developed based on the concept of teaching factories.