Research Article

PubsMeetT 1: A Guide for Enhancing Tertiary ESL Speaking Skills

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Abstract:

Many Malaysian ESL undergraduates encounter communication apprehension while performing public speaking activities as they continue learning their respective courses that require oral presentations as part of assessments through online platforms as well as face to face classes. Accordingly, courses need to be tweaked to cater for the demand of crucial employability skill which requires the individual to have communication skills and to be a fluent English speaker. Realizing that many Malaysian ESL undergraduates experience communication apprehension when it comes to public speaking or oral presentation skills which impedes employability, thus, an effective and engaging technique needs to be implemented in a way that can incorporate speaking skills through the usage of the target language. An interactive meeting template known as Public Speaking Meeting Template 1 (PubsMeetT 1), has been developed for ESL teaching and learning to enhance the oral presentation skills among the undergraduates. This template would be a guide to enhance the undergraduates' oral presentation skills as it will involve the ESL learners to take part in specific roles for classes based on the roles assigned. Thus, the objective of the template is to prepare ESL undergraduates for real-life meetings that need different responses at times and to create a conducive environment to promote communication and leadership skills at meetings. The novelty of this template is that it is designed for an hour's session that could be utilized conveniently for different classes as it can be re-used by editing the interactive template that caters for the needs of the course which promotes a positive environment to foster communication skills.

Keywords: Communication apprehension, communication skills, public speaking, Malaysian ESL undergraduates.

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication apprehension (CA) is regarded as one of the main obstacles in public speaking (Lucas, 2015; McCroskey, 1977). CA is defined as fear that is usually experienced during public speaking since 1915 with the term used then as stage fright (Clevenger, 1955). It has been an obstacle among the undergraduates where those affected would be unwilling to communicate. Poor command of the English language especially in conversational skills is one of the main reasons why many graduates in Malaysia face difficulties finding employments (Hamid et al., 2014). Potential employers can easily detect both the strengths and weaknesses of future employees during interviews. Hence, low

proficiency levels, coupled with limited exposure to real workplace communication have brought about this predicament (D'Silva, 2020; Leo, 2018).

Many Malaysian ESL undergraduates face communication apprehension while performing public speaking as they continue learning their respective courses that require oral presentations as part of their assessments through online platforms as well as face to face classes (Jalleh et al., 2021). Accordingly, courses need to be tweaked to cater for the demand of crucial employability skill which requires the individual to have communication skills and to be a fluent English speaker. Since many Malaysian ESL undergraduates experience communication apprehension when it comes to public speaking or oral presentation skills which hinders employability, then an effective and engaging technique needs to be implemented in a way that can incorporate speaking skills through the usage of the target language. Hence, a remedy in the teaching and learning process in the classroom was identified to address communication apprehension. As a result, a teaching technique using a template to boost self confidence in Public Speaking based on Self-Efficacy theory was created (Bandura, 1997).

An interactive meeting template known as PubsMeetT 1 has been developed for ESL teaching and learning to enhance the oral presentation skills among the undergraduates. This template would be a guide to enhance the undergraduates' oral presentation skills as it will involve the ESL learners to take part in specific roles for particular classes based on the roles assigned. Thus, the objective of the template is to prepare ESL undergraduates for real-life meetings that need different responses at times and to create a conducive environment to promote communication and leadership skills at meetings. The novelty of this template is that it is designed to be utilized conveniently for different classes as it can be re-used by editing the interactive template that caters for the needs of the course which promotes a positive environment to foster communication skills.

2. METHOD AND MATERIALS

An adapted and modified template has been created as a strategy to build self-confidence and reduce communication apprehension (Toastmasters Internatioanal, 2015). The foundation of the template is based on the belief of Thomas Theorem (Thomas & Thomas, 1928) which states that "*If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.*" In other words, it can be as Napoleon Hill puts it, "*whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve.*"

PubsMeetT 1 is created as a complement to promote communication skills in a public speaking where the one-hour session is carried out based on a template with specific roles assigned to the participants in advance. In the initial stages, the instructor may take up the role as a General Evaluator to give a pointer on how to give overall feedback or run the meeting to the students. Based on Figure 1, the template needs to be filled out prior to the class. Those participants who are new can get a brief about the roles from the interactive bold hyperlinks that activates and downloads audio or even black and white scripts. Thus, the convenience of using the template enhances direct participations of the students in the class.

Public Speaking Meeting Template (PubsMeetT) 1

Theme:		
Meeting Date:		**Word of the Day:**

PROGRAMME ELEMENT	ROLE PLAYER	TIME ALLOWED

MASTER OF CEREMONY
✓ Welcomes everyone to the meeting
✓ Shares "Thought for the Day"
✓ Calls on the Role Players to explain their duties:
   ✓ Time-keeper
   ✓ English Teacher
   ✓ Filler-Counter
   ✓ General Evaluator
   ✓ Impromptu Master
   ✓ Impromptu Evaluator
		10

MASTER OF CEREMONY ✓ Invites the English Teacher to introduce the Word of the Day		1
ENGLISH TEACHER ✓ Introduces the Word of the Day ✓ Returns control to the Master of Ceremony		2
MASTER OF CEREMONY ✓ Hands control to the Impromptu Master		1
IMPROMPTU MASTER ✓ Conducts the Impromptu Session ✓ Returns control to the Master of Ceremony		25

MASTER OF CEREMONY
✓ Calls for:
   ✓ Time-keeper's Report (30 secs)
   ✓ Impromptu Evaluator's Report (3 mins)
		5

MASTER OF CEREMONY Hands control to General Evaluator		1

GENERAL EVALUATOR
✓ Calls for Reports from:
   ✓ Timekeeper (1 min)
   ✓ English Teacher (3 min) and Filler Counter (1mins)
✓ General Remarks (5 mins)
   Returns control to the Master of Ceremony
		10

MASTER OF CEREMONY ✓ Invites two participants to give comments (3 mins) ✓ Closing Remarks (2 mins) Asks a member to take photo or screenshot **MEETING ENDS**		5

SCRIPTS

✓	Time-keeper
✓	English Teacher
✓	Filler-Counter
✓	General Evaluator
✓	Impromptu Master
✓	Impromptu Evaluator

Example of usage of "Word of the Day"

Figure 1. Public Speaking Meeting Template 1 (PubsMeetT 1)

3. FINDINGS

PubsMeetT 1 has been implemented last semester among first year learners in a public university in Sabah, Malaysia, to complement an oral presentation course. It has been employed this in 6 classes where each class took one hour of the duration per class . A group of students has been interviewed to explore their perceptions towards the use PubsMeetT 1. Most of the students who have utilised PubsMeetT 1 found it interesting, and they were encouraged to speak in the English language despite them having no knowledge on how to carry out the session initially. Thus, the template was helpful in providing not only descriptions of the roles but also scripts and audio downloads with click of a finger. The responses were overwhelmingly positive as most students who used the template were guided on how to carry out the session without any instructions of the instructor.

3.1 Novelty

The uniqueness of PubsMeetT 1 is that meetings are carried out in a non-threatening manner where participants can take up even the simplest roles like that of a time-keeper or "Filler-Counter" (the person who keeps a tab of, and reports on the number of pause fillers uttered by participants during the meeting). The important aspect of the template is that students get to communicate in the target language, i.e., English. Over time, even the students with apprehension in speaking in English can converse in the language, and this is achieved in a most relaxed and enjoyable setting onsite or online.

In addition, PubsMeetT 1 can be a unique way to promote communication skills as the participants can learn new vocabulary at every meeting. The main focus of the template is to overcome fear by standing up and speaking. Besides, grammatical errors are not highlighted as long as the speech is understood. This would encourage those who are less competent in the English language to speak without being embarrassed of being corrected.

It also complements the Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint aim to produce graduates who are resilient and brave in the workplace (Malaysia Ministry of Education, 2015).

4. CONCLUSION

It is imperative that proactive measures be taken to improve the communication skills of undergraduates to enhance their employability prospects. PubsMeetT 1 provides an avenue for these undergraduates to engage in oral interaction featuring real life situations in a non-threatening manner. With greater self-confidence and a good command of the language, they would be better equipped to communicate and express themselves effectively, thus meeting the standards that industry demands.

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