_____

IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILLS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Jotiram Gaikwad[1] and Tripti Karekatti[2]
[1]St. Xavier's College-Autonomous, Mumbai.
[2]Department of English, Shivaji University, Kolhapur.

ABSTRACT

Though speaking is the most important skills of language, it is difficult and challenging skill for the second or foreign language learners. Because of this, the present study was undertaken to help undergraduate students to improve their spoken English. It is an experimental research and it was conducted on twenty students of First Year of Bachelor of Commerce (F.Y.B.COM.) course. English was taught over a period of three months as per the designed teaching/learning module (TLM) developed by the present researcher. The data was collected through speech task before and after the teaching to assess, evaluate and compare their performance. This study sought to find out the effectiveness of TLM and the activities conducted to promote learners' active participation in speaking skills at undergraduate level. The research findings states that the students' English speaking abilities significantly higher in the post-test than the pre-test.

KEY WORDS: *foreign language learners , English speaking abilities , communicates ideas.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Speaking is defined as a two–way process that communicates ideas, information or feelings (Eckard & Kearny, 1981; Florez, 1999; and Howarth, 2001); an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information (Burns & Joyce, 1997; Luoma, 2004; Brown, 1994); and a skill by which people are judged and first impressions are formed (Hedge, 2000). In simple terms, speaking is an interactive process that reflects person's thoughts and personality.

Researchers observe that speaking is the most difficult skill for most learners who learn it as a second or foreign language due to their low proficiency (Alonso 2014; Alharbi 2015; Al-Hosni, 2014; Zhang 2009). Brown (1994) labels speaking as the most challenging skill for the students because of the following features that characterize oral discourse:

- Contractions, vowel reductions and elision;
- The use of slang and idioms:
- Stress, rhythm and intonation;
- The need to interact with at least one other speaker.

As speaking is a difficult and a challenging skill, it deserves attention as much as the literary skills in both native and foreign languages (Bygate, 1987). Because of this, the present study was undertaken to help undergraduate students to improve their spoken English. It is concerned with developing speaking skills in English of the undergraduate students using teaching/learning module (TLM) developed by the present researcher. The students were given training using a teaching/learning module for three months to find out effectiveness of TLM in English Language Teaching (ELT). The present paper is divided into five sections –

_____

_____

section-1 is an introduction which describes the aim of the present study, section-2 spells out the research design, section-3 deals with data analysis, section-4 states the findings and section-5 provides the concluding remarks.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN:

In this section, subjects of the study and teaching/learning module (TLM) are discussed. The techniques employed for data collection and data analysis are also described.

2.1 Subjects of the Study:

The present study was conducted on twenty students of First Year of Bachelor of Commerce (F.Y.B.Com.) class of St. Xavier's College - Autonomous, Mumbai, during the academic year 2013-2014. This number (20 students) couldn't have been further increased as they were to be intensively trained over a period of three months.

2.2 Teaching/Learning Module (TLM):

The present teaching module developed by the researcher was a working plan for teaching English. It was prepared on the basis of the subject 'Communication Skills in English' of F.Y.B.COM. It included the following components of the regular syllabus of 'Communication Skills in English':

1. Brief overlook of grammar: Parts of Speech, Tense, Articles, Sentence Construction
2. Language Skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing
3. Speaking: Naturalness, Fluencey, Pronounciation, Voice Modulationn
4. Presentation: Principles of Effective Presentation, Effective use of OHP, Effective use of Transparencies, How to make a Power Point Presentation

In addition to the above mentioned topics of the subject 'Communication Skills in English', the following additional topics were included in the TLM:

1. Refreshing Grammar: Auxiliaries, Modal Verbs/Modals, Sentence, Phrases, Clauses
2. Speaking Activities: Stress and Rhythm, Intonation
3. Conversational (Situational) Activities: Includes every day functions of face-to-face and telephonic communication such as: greeting and introducing, making requests, asking for and giving permissions, offering a help, giving instructions and directions, making requests through telephone.
4. Professional activities: Group Discusion, Interviews, Public Speaking

English was taught using TLM in the regular classroom as per the regular time table of the college where the syllabus of the regular course and the teaching module overlapped. For the additional components of teaching module, extra classes were conducted.

During teaching, importance was given to practicing English than just teaching and lecturing as practice provides many opportunities to the students for developing their speaking skills. Harmer (1983) states that the language activities are important factors in teaching language for communication. Language scholars observe that oral drills help students to improve by practicing and consequently perfect their skills in speech (Broughtton et al, 1980; Kochhar, 1992; Ayot, 1984).

2.3 Data Elicitation Tools:

Data was collected through oral tests before and after the teaching. The participants were asked to speak on on any one of the given topics for five minutes in the pre-test as well as the post-test. The topics given for the pre-test were:

- My favourite actor/hero/movie/sport/sportsman

_____

_____

The topics given for the post-test were:
- A place I visited in the Christmas vacations
- My favourite personality

2.4 Data Analysis Tools:

The data is analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. The qualitative analysis is done on the basis of the organisation of text. The data is also analysed to check the increase in number of words used from the pre-test to the post-test. The main aim of the analysis is to see to what extent the teaching module designed and activities conducted could improve the performance of the students in English.

3. ANALYSIS:

The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the speech task was done on the basis of the ability to organise the text, and the number of words used in the pre-test and the post-test. In the quoted examples, figures in bracket – 01, 02, 03, and so on, indicate participant's number; I01, I02, I03, and so on, indicate participant 01, 02, 03, and so on, in the pre-test; and II01, II02, II03, and so on, indicate participant 01, 02, 03, and so on, in the post-test.

3.1 Ability to organise the text:

A detailed analysis of the speeches found the following things on the organization of text in the pre-test and the post-test.

Some speeches are organized. These speeches are considered organized as they have a beginning, a middle and an end. For example,

* good evening friends … er please allow me to introduce myself … my name is Abhijit … my roll no is sixty nine … … now I am … talking about … my favourite … er great personality … er Lokmanya Tilak … er he is my great favourite personality … er he is not only a great personality but also … a great freedom fighter … er his full name Bal Gangadhar Tilak … er then he born at … er Chikali … which is located at Ratnagiri … er when he was a child … he lost her mother … er … er then he complete his education … he joined … er British government job … er British government department job … er when he realized the many Indians are … er not er … able to er … er get er … … not able to get … um … equity … er equality and er … fairness er … fairness … … he er … rised … the sound er … British government arrest them … er British government arrest them … … when he was in the jail … he er he was not afraid … he written er … two greatest books … which is Kesari and Maratha … then he started … er two great festival … which is … er Ganesh Jayanti … er … Shree Ganesh Jayanti … and then Chatrapatti Shivaji Maharj Jayanti … he is my great … er personality … … great er freedom fighter … thank you (II10)

The quoted speech (II10) is on the topic, 'my favourite personality.' The speech is on 'Lokmanya Tilak'. The speech is organized as it has beginning, middle and end. Speaker after introducing Lokmanya Tilak in the beginning tells about him before summarizing him as a great personality.

Most of the speeches are partially organized. These speeches are considered partially organized as they lack either beginning or middle or end. For example,

* good evening friends … my name is XYZ … XYZ … today I am tell about … my great personality … my great personality … is er … M S Dhoni … Mahendrasingh … his name is Mahendrasingh Dhoni … he is a … captain of … he is a … team India captain … he … he..he gave … he..he gave India … er … … … he gave the er … India er … er world cup … of T twenty … and … ODI … … he..he always encourages the … … fielders … … I like his skill … his skill is very … smooth er … skill is very different … he..he … he is a change the … he is change the … bat … for time … timing … (??) … … … his..his captain is..is..is captainship is very good … and … … … thank you (II14)

The quoted speech is on the topic, 'my favourite personality'. The speech is on Mahendra Singh Dhoni. The speech is partially organized as it has only beginning and middle and no ending. Participant after introducing Mahendra Singh Dhoni in the beginning tells about him but ends the speech abruptly.

_____

_____

Some speeches are badly organized. These speeches are considered badly organized as they have either beginning or middle or end and not all. For instance,

* good evening friends … … good evening friends … my favourite actors is (??) … and … er she er … she is (??) (??) (??) … … and she is er … and she … worked … lot of … lot of bollywood movies … er … lot of bollywood movies … (??) er … and … … … she is … she is er … (??) … (??) good evening friends … … good evening friends … (I06)

The quoted speech is on the topic, 'my favourite actor'. The participant due to language problem has given up the speech immediately without middle or concluding remarks.

Figure-1 shows the levels of the organization of text in speeches given by the participants in the pre-test and the post-test.
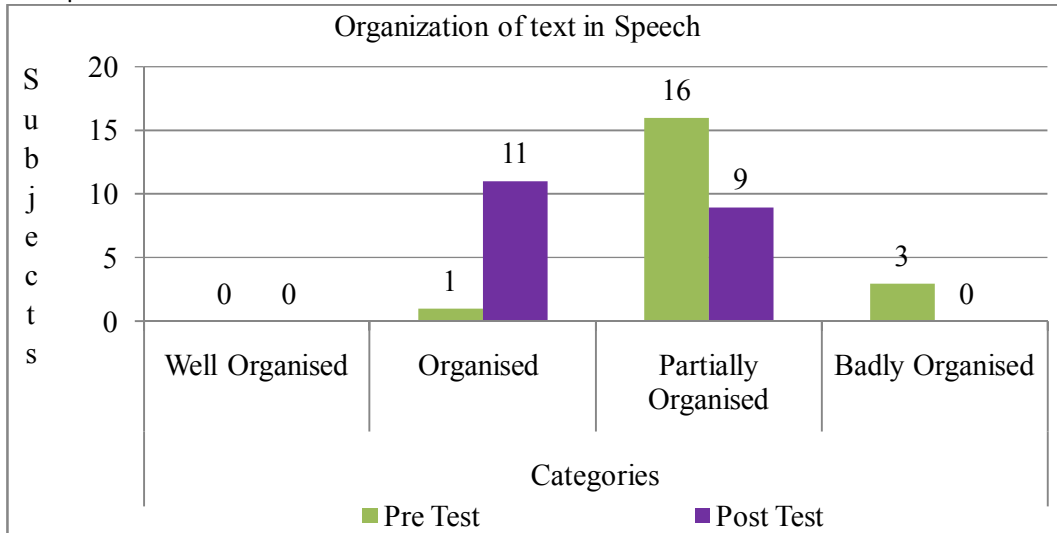

Figure-1: Organization of text in Speech

Speeches given by one participant (I16) in the pre-test and eleven participants (II01, 03, 04, 06, 07, 08, 10, 12, 18, 19, 20) in the post-test are organized. Sixteen participants (I01, 02, 03, 04, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20) in the pre-test and nine participants (II02, 05, 09, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17) in the post-test gave partially organised speeches. Three speeches (I05, 06, 07) in the pre-test are badly organised. Sadly, not a single speech given by the participants is well organised.

The performance of the participants has improved as the number of organised speeches has increased, and the number of partially and badly organised speeches has decreased from the pre-test to the post-test. The average performance on the organization of text has increased from the pre-test to the post-test though not a single speech given by the participants was found to be well organised.

Improvement in the performance of the participants from the pre-test to the post-test can be the result of teaching module used for teaching English and communicative activities conducted during the training period. However, their grammatical competence doesn't show the same level of improvement.

3.2 Increase in the number of words:

The data collected is also analysed to check the increase in the number of words from the pre-test to the post-test. Figure-2 presents the number of words used by the subjects in the pre-test and the post-test in speech.
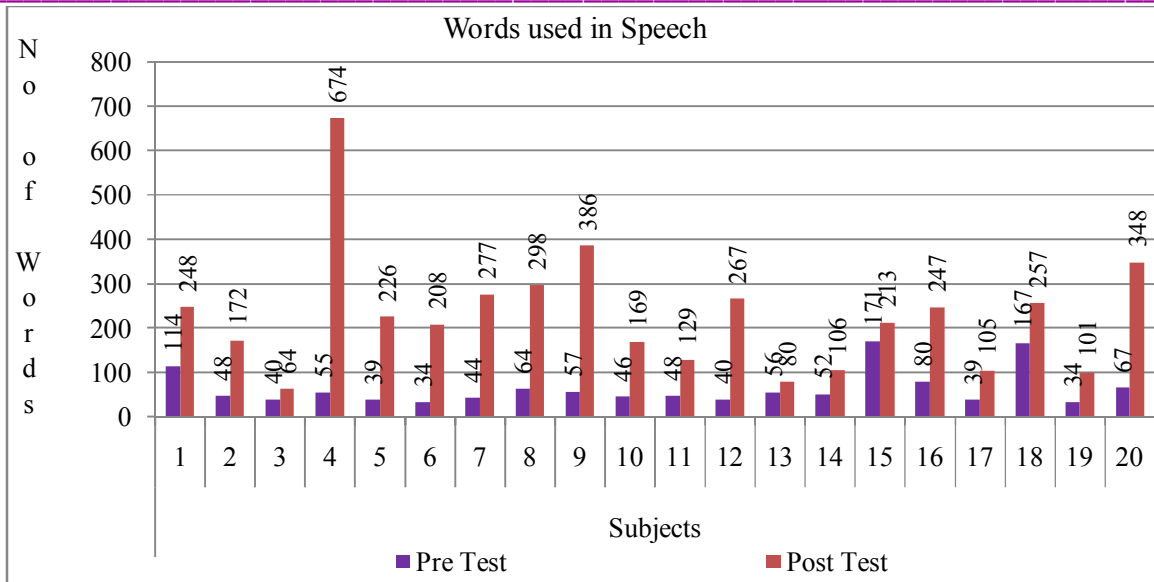
_____
Available online at www.lbp.world

Figure-2: Words used in Speech

The use of number of words has increased from the pre-test to the post-test in all the participants. Next figure (Figure-3) presents the total number of words used by the participants in the pre-test and the post-test in speech task.
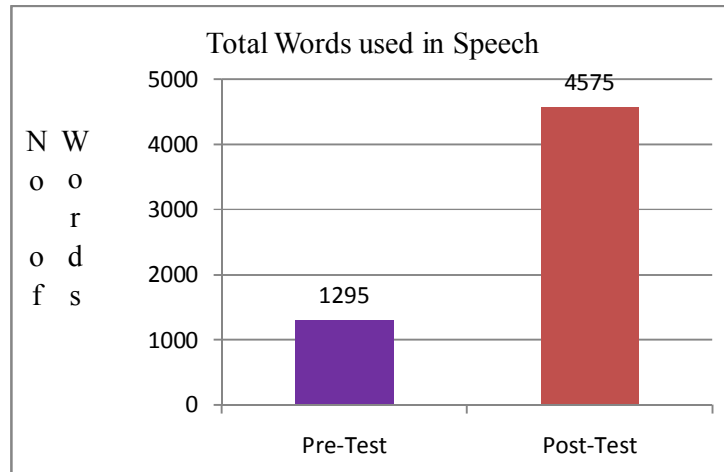

Figure 5.4: Total words used in Speech

The total number of words used by the participants while giving speeches has increased from 1295 words in the pre-test to 4575 words in the post-test. The increase in the use of number of words from the pre-test to the post-test indicates that the training has boosted the confidence of the participants and has motivated them to produce longer strings.

4. FINDINGS:

The findings of the analysis of the language data collected through the speech task are as stated below:

_____
Available online at www.lbp.world

5

_____

The teaching/learning module (TLM) used and the activities conducted for teaching English have had a positive impact and this is supported by the following observations:

- The number of organised speeches deliverred by the participants has increased from the pre-test to the post-test.
- The number of partially and badly organised speeches deliverred by the participants has decreased from the pre-test to the post-test.
- The use of words from the pre-test to the post-test has increased in all the participants.
- The use of total number of words has increased from the pre-test to the post-test.

The increase in the use of number of words and the organisation of the text from the pre-test to the post-test indicates that the training has boosted the confidence of the students to engage in communication in English and has motivated them to produce longer strings.

Though marked improvement is noted in the increase in the number of words used and organization of text from the pre-test to the post-test, their performance in grammar doesn't show the same level of improvement and this has a strong impact on the overall impression of their speech. Even with the help of activity-based practice sessions, it is difficult to notice a change through short-term courses. The researcher concludes that the training was not sufficient in terms of the length of the course to improve their grammatical competence.

It was found that when teaching is done for small groups of students, the results are better. Speaking skills can be developed as per the learners' interests. Teacher can come to know the level of the students' speaking and then provide instructions as well as training in techniques of speaking according to the needs and current competence of students.

Most of the learners lack motivation to speak English. However, skills are developed when the learner is motivated. So, it is necessary to provide constant motivation in order to promote confidence and self-learning.

It was found that the activities motivate and encourage students to communicate orally without any pressure. Students overcome fear of making mistakes and perceive speaking as a natural process. Besides, activities help students to gain confidence in speaking and to believe in themselves.

5. CONCLUSION:

The discussion and results show that the overall performance of the students in acquiring speaking skill through the training provided through TLM was found satisfactory. There is an improvement in the performance of all the participants from the pre-test to the post-test. The progress indicates that the teaching/learning module (TLM) developed by the present researcher and activities conducted throughout the academic year have had a positive impact in teaching English language.

LIST OF THE SYMBOLS USED:

…	: Short Pause (approximately of five seconds)
… …	: Long Pause (approximately of five to ten seconds)
… … …	: Very Long Pause (more than ten seconds)
er	: Filler
um	: Filler
hm	: Filler
word..word	: repetition of word
(??)	: Inaudible words
*	: Indicates sentence is grammatically incorrect
XYZ	: For replacing the name or identity of the subject

_____

_____

REFERENCES:

Al Hosni, Samira, (2014). Speaking difficulties encountered by young EFL learners. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature* (IJSELL) Volume 2, Issue 6, June 2014, pp. 22-30.

Alharbi, A. Heba, (2015). Improving students' English speaking proficiency in Saudi public schools. *International Journal of Instruction* Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 105-116.

Alonso, A. Rosa, (2014). Teaching speaking: An exploratory study in two academic contexts. *Porta Linguarum* 22, June 2014, pp. 145-160.

Ayot, O. Henry, (1984). *Language for learning, A methodology book for English language learning in secondary Schools*, Nairobi: Macmillan Kenya (Publishers) Ltd.

Broughton, G. et al. (1980). *Teaching English as a foreign language*, London: Routledge.

Brown, H. (1994). *Teaching by principles: an interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

Burns, A & Joyce, H. (1997). *Focus on speaking.* Sydney: National center for English Language Teaching and Research.

Bygate, M. (1987). *Speaking*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Eckard, R. & Kearny, M. (1981). *Teaching conversational skills in ESL*. Washington: Center of Applied Linguistics.

Florez, M. A. (1999). "Improving adult English language learners' speaking skills". ERIC Digest. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED: 435204)

Harmer, J. (1983). *The practice of English language teaching* (6th). New York: Longman Group.

Hedge, T. (2000). *Teaching and learning in the language classroom.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Howarth, P. (2001). "Process speaking. preparing to repeat yourself". *MET*. V, 10 (1), pp: 39-44.

Kochhar, Sanjay K. (1992). *Methods and techniques of teaching.* New Delhi: Sterling Publishers LTD.

Luoma, S. (2004). *Assessing speaking*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zhang, Shumei, (2009). The role of input, interaction and output in the development of oral fluency. *English language Teaching*, 2(4), 91-100.

_____