Effect of a Separate Course Module on Reducing Public Speaking Anxiety Among Undergraduates of Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka

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Abstract: The effect of teaching presentation skills through a separate course module, on reducing public speaking anxiety among undergraduates was investigated. The research was conducted as a case study based on the 3rd year undergraduates of the Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka, since 'Presentation Skills' is a compulsory course modulefor all the 3rd year undergraduates of the university. The study was conducted at the beginning and at the end of the semester, using the questionnaire of Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) developed by McCrosky (1970; 1992). It was revealed that the public speaking anxiety of undergraduates has been reduced significantly after following the course module on presentation skills. The percentage of undergraduates having high level of public speaking anxiety was 64% before the commencement of the course module and was reduced to 5% after the completion.Thus, the course module can be considered effective and providing expected results.
Key Words; Public speaking, Public speaking anxiety, Undergraduates, Communication skills

I. INTRODUCTION

It is said that ahead of death, spiders or height, the most common fear is public speaking. Public speaking anxiety which is also called as Glassophobia, can be defined as a state of uneasiness or fear caused by the anticipation of something threatening. In the medical field, public speaking anxiety has been defined as one of the very common social phobias, which involves other people. These are performance situations in which one person is exposed to unfamiliar people as well as possible scrutiny by others. According to the American Psychiatric Association (1995), "an individual fear that he or she will perform in a way that will be embarrassing". As McCroskeystates, "public speaking anxiety is a communication apprehension which individual's level of fear associated with real or other people". (McCroskey. 1977). According to Bodie, "public speaking anxiety is a situation-specific social fear that arises from a real or anticipated performing of presentation". (Bodie. 2010)

Many research workhasbeen done on public speaking anxiety (North,M. et al, 1998), and this has been a main topic for research since the mid-1930s(Rossie& Seiler, 1989). For more than eight decades, a large number of scholars in many fields, such as education,political science, public relations, media,communication etc., have paid their attention on public speaking skills. High level of public speaking skills is of utmost importance for the professionals in those fields, and there are many training programs available to enhance public speaking skills.Undoubtedly, the university undergraduates are also expected to develop their communication skills. However, the fear of delivering a speech or a making presentation in front of a large audience is a major concern for many university undergraduates. For some, making a presentation in front of a very small audience, even with familiar faces, is a difficult task. Sweating, shivering, forgetting the information, feeling nervousness etc., are the common symptoms of public speaking anxiety that most of the undergraduates also face.

The present study is aimed at assessing the impact of teaching presentation skills through a separate course module, on reducing public speaking anxiety among undergraduates

II. METHODOLOGY

Sample

The Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka was selected for the case study, and the justification for the particular selection is that the Uva Wellassa University offers a separate course module on Presentation Skills for all the 3[rd]year students, as a compulsory subject. The sample of 200 undergraduates including 100 female and 100 male students covering all 13 degree programs offed in the university, was selected using convenient sampling method.

Data Collection

This research study is based on primary data collection method where data were collected based on convenient sampling technique. The undergraduates were given the questionnaire to answer based on their choice of attempting or not.

The study was conducted in two phases. Firstly, the students were given the questionnaire before conducting the first lecture at the beginning of the semester, and a pre-test was conducted.Thereafter, the course module on Presentation Skills was conducted through lectures and practical sessions. The second phase of the study was done at the end of the semester to evaluate the effectiveness of the course module. Before distribution of the questionnaire, a brief introduction was given to the studentsregarding the procedure.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sample of the study consisted of 200 undergraduates including 100 female and 100 male students, and the gender-wise distribution is shown in the Figure 1. Further, the age-wise distribution of the sample is shown in Figure 2.
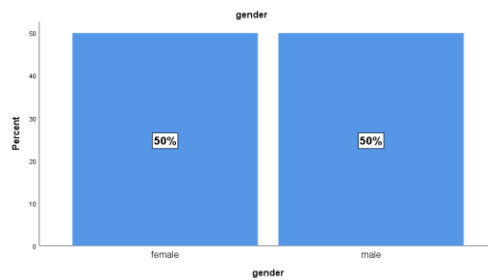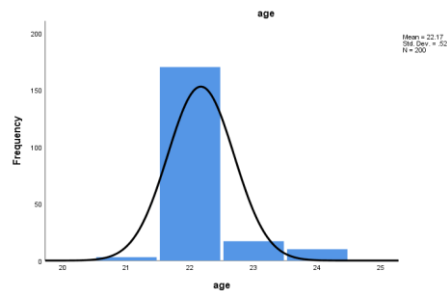

Figure 1. Sample – Gender-Wise Distribution

Figure 2. Sample – Age Distribution

As it can be seen from Figure 2, the majority of students (170) were from age 22, and the percentagewas 85%. There were 17 students from the age group 23 (8.5%), 10 (5%) students from the age group 24, and there were only 3 (1.5%) students from the age group 21.
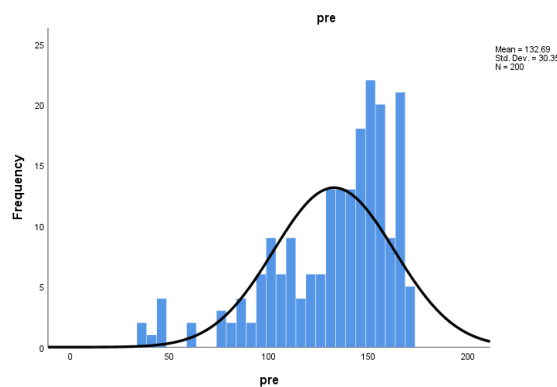

Figure 3. Marks Obtained by the Students for the Pre-Test

When the marks obtained by the students for the pre-test are considered (Figure 3), it is clear that the majority of the students have experienced a high level of public speaking anxiety. It has to be noted that

according to the McCroskey's normalized Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety, scores of 131-170 indicate high anxiety.
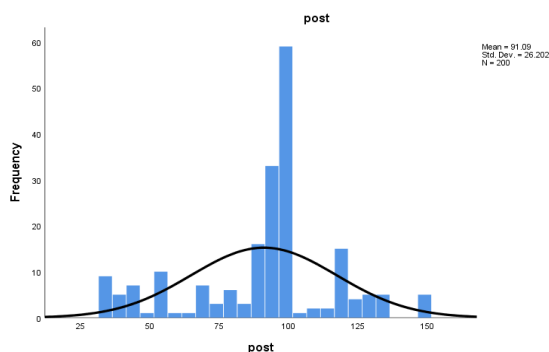

Figure 4. Marks Obtained by the Students for the Post-Test

The marks obtained by the students for the post-test (Figure 4) indicate, that after the completion of the course module, the majority of the students have experienced a low level of public speaking anxiety. According to the McCroskey's normalized Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety, the scores below 98 indicate low anxiety.

As it can be inferred from Table 1, the mean of the pre-test marks of this study is 132.69 and standard deviation is 30.35. Standard Error Mean is 2.146. The mean of the post-test marks is 91.09 and standard deviation is 26.202. Standard Error Mean is 1.853.

Table 1. Mean, Standard Deviation and Standard Error Mean

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	pre	132.69	200	30.350	2.146
	post	91.10	200	26.202	1.853

Table 2. Paired Differences

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	pre - post	41.590	19.213	1.359	38.911	44.269	**30.614**	**199**	**0.000**

As it can be seen from the Table 2, Mean of the Paired difference is 41.590. Its Lower value at the 95% confidence interval is 38.911 and Upper value is 44.269. T value is 30.614. Degree of freedom is 199, which is highly significant.

Table 3. Level of Anxiety- Pre test

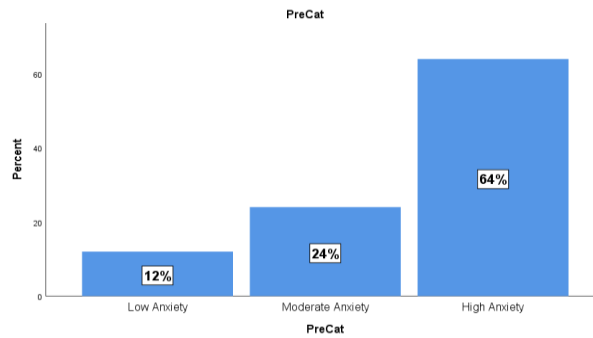| **PreCat**					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Low Anxiety	24	12.0	12.0	12.0
	Moderate Anxiety	48	24.0	24.0	36.0
	High Anxiety	128	64.0	64.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Figure 5. Level of Anxiety- pre-test

As it can be inferred from the Table 3 and Figure 5, in the pre- test, the frequency of low anxiety was 24 (12%), moderate anxiety was 48 (24%) and high anxiety was 128 (64%)

Table 4. Level of Anxiety- post-test

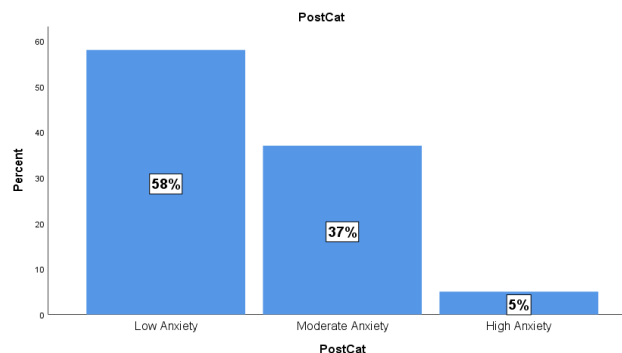| PostCat					
		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Valid	**Low Anxiety**	116	58.0	58.0	58.0
	Moderate Anxiety	74	37.0	37.0	95.0
	High Anxiety	10	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Figure 6. Level of Anxiety- post-test

As it can be seen from the Table 4 and Figure 6, in the post-test, the frequency of low anxiety was 116 (58%), moderate anxiety was 74 (37%) and high anxiety was 10 (5%).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Public speaking anxiety is very common among undergraduates, and in general, they are reluctant to make a presentation in front of a large audience. Moreover, some students even avoid speaking in a classroom setting fearing being getting embarrassed and/or humiliated. Sometimes, the students who obtain good marks in written examinations fail to do so in oral presentations. In addition, during presentations on group assignments, many students tend to stay backward by pushing others to speak. In the case of individual presentations, many students suffer from anxiety. In the worst, scenarios, some students are dropping put from their degree programs, mainly due to this anxiety.

On the other hand, oral presentations are a compulsory element in present day undergraduate education and the undergraduates are required to make presentations on a regular basis. Further, communication skills are a key skill required by the current job market. The course module on Presentation Skills compulsory for all 3rd year students of the Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka is aimed at addressing this issue. The present study is

aimed at assessing the effectiveness of this particular course module on reducing public speaking anxiety among undergraduates.

It was found that a significantly high level of public speaking anxietywas prevalent among the students before the commencement of the course. The percentage of undergraduates having high level of public speaking anxiety was 64%. The percentage of those who had moderate level of anxiety was 24% while the percentage of those who had low level of anxiety was 12%. However, after the completion of the course module, the results of the post-test have indicated that the percentage of students having high level of anxiety has reduced to 5% and the percentage of low level of anxiety had been increased up to 58%. These results clearly show that the students have developed their public speaking skills through this course module and have gained confidence in public speaking. Thus, the course module can be considered effective and providing expected results.

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