

Optimizing Pathways for Enhancing University Students' Public Speech Ability

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Abstract: Public speaking is a vital skill that significantly influences the personal development and future success of university students. University represents a pivotal phase in a young person's life, marked by high potential for growth, and public speaking is an ability that can be developed with practice. Recognizing the importance of this skill, it is essential for universities, educators, and students to reach a shared understanding and work collaboratively. By leveraging the diverse platforms and opportunities available during university life, it is possible to effectively enhance students' public speaking abilities. Such efforts will not only enable students to demonstrate their talents more fully but also empower them to contribute more meaningfully to society and realize their personal aspirations and ideals.

Keywords: University Students; Public Speech Ability; The Age of Artificial Intelligence; Self-Efficacy

1. Introduction

Public speaking, also referred to as lecturing or oration, is a form of verbal communication in which an individual addresses a public audience on a specific issue, presenting their viewpoints and propositions clearly and comprehensively. This involves the use of spoken language as the primary medium, with body language serving as a complementary tool. Public speaking aims to clarify ideas, convey emotions, or persuade and inspire the audience. As an essential communication skill, public speaking plays a crucial role in the personal growth and societal integration of university students. It is imperative for universities and educators to create supportive environments that allow students to develop a profound understanding and mastery of public speaking techniques. University students

should actively engage in the numerous public speaking opportunities offered during their academic journey, fostering strong social communication skills and enhancing their ability to connect emotionally and intellectually with others [1].

2. A Deep Understanding of the Importance of Public Speech Ability

University is a critical period in one's life, marking a time of profound personal growth and development. It is a unique phase when students possess a high degree of malleability, making it an ideal moment to cultivate important life skills. Since thoughts precede actions, it is essential to recognize early on the importance of public Speech ability and foster an awareness of speaking. This awareness becomes the foundation for effective communication, enabling individuals to understand clearly what they need to do and why it matters [2].

2.1 Insights from Historical Figures in China and Foreign Countries

Former U.S. President Richard Nixon once remarked, "If I had the opportunity to return to college, I would focus on two subjects: public speaking and persuasion." Similarly, the famous Chinese author Lao She expressed, "Our finest thoughts and deepest emotions can only be conveyed through the most beautiful language. If we fail to express them, how can others understand the depth of those thoughts and feelings? These elements are inseparable and unified." Dale Carnegie, a renowned expert in interpersonal relations, stated, "Public speaking is a latent skill within everyone; the real question is whether one discovers, develops, and harnesses this natural talent. The ability to stand up and speak in front of others is often a decisive step toward success."

2.2 The Role of Public Speaking in University Growth and Development

Throughout university, students face numerous opportunities where public speaking is crucial, such as in student leadership elections, professional competitions, thesis defenses and extracurricular events. Students with strong public Speech ability often stand out, gaining more favor and opportunities, which subsequently enhances their sense of well-being, achievement, and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their own ability to accomplish tasks. Studies show that individuals with high self-efficacy tend to achieve more than those with low self-efficacy, even when their knowledge and abilities are similar. High self-efficacy individuals are generally optimistic, embrace challenges, and persist through difficulties. In contrast, those with lower self-efficacy may become hesitant, emotional, or struggle under pressure. Therefore, developing strong public Speech ability in university is not only essential for personal growth but also for fostering a proactive mindset that supports academic and career success.

2.3 Public Speaking and Career Advancement

As university students transition into the professional world, they will increasingly find themselves in situations where effective communication is essential. Public speaking has become a key indicator of professional competence, with "communication skills" now encompassing a broader set of capabilities, including organizational, critical thinking, and self-learning skills [3]. Those with strong public speaking abilities often excel in communication, coordination, and leadership, which contributes to smoother career progression. Moreover, many organizations use public speaking as a criterion for promotions or leadership positions, with those who excel in speech often rising to the top. Indeed, many successful leaders are also accomplished orators. A well-delivered speech can rally support, inspire a team, and strengthen morale. As such, public speaking is an important measure of leadership potential.

2.4 The Relevance of Public Speaking in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

In the current era of artificial intelligence,

human qualities such as creativity, emotional intelligence, and effective expression remain irreplaceable by machines. These abilities are now recognized as essential competencies for success in the modern world. Public speaking, as a crucial form of personal expression, is one such skill that cannot be easily substituted by AI. Those who have honed their public Speech ability are better positioned to adapt to a rapidly changing world. Even as job functions evolve in the age of automation, strong communication skills will ensure individuals continue to thrive in their careers.

3. Mastering the Fundamentals of Public Speaking

The primary aim of public speaking is for the speaker to inform and persuade the audience. Informing involves presenting, clarifying, or explaining the topic, which is the main purpose of lectures, seminars, and workshops. Persuasion, on the other hand, seeks to alter or reinforce the audience's attitudes, beliefs, values, or behaviors. Speeches given in political campaigns, television advertisements, or corporate IPO presentations all aim to persuade and mobilize the audience. To achieve the desired outcome in a speech, it is crucial to master the three essential skills of public speaking: content, voice, and image.

3.1 The Content of the Speech

Among the fundamentals of public speaking, the content is the most vital. As the saying goes, "A skilled cook cannot make a meal without ingredients", and similarly, a speaker cannot deliver an impactful speech without solid content. A good speech must present valuable content; otherwise, it will be rendered meaningless. No matter how captivating the speaker's voice or how dynamic their body language, these cannot compensate for disorganized, unfocused content. Clear, concise, and well-structured content, however, enables the speaker to think clearly and respond with composure, ensuring the effectiveness of the speech.

3.2 The Speaker's Image

The speaker's image refers to everything the audience perceives visually—this includes body language, appearance, gestures, posture, attire, facial expressions, and eye contact. The image plays a significant role in public

speaking, serving as a powerful complement to the speaker's voice. A speaker's image reflects their inner values, offering a glimpse into their understanding of life and the goals they are pursuing. It is crucial for the speaker to recognize the importance of their image and utilize it effectively to enhance their delivery. Neglecting one's image can lead to the underestimation of the speaker's abilities, undermining the impact of the speech.

3.3 The Speaker's Voice

The speaker's voice refers to the auditory elements that convey the message to the audience, including pronunciation, tone, speed, and intonation. The voice must be clear and varied. Clarity ensures that the audience can understand what is being said, so the speaker must articulate each word clearly, maintain a moderate pace, and project their voice at an appropriate volume. Variation refers to the ability to modulate the pace, volume, and pitch based on the content and context of the speech. This variation creates a dynamic, engaging rhythm, with fluctuations in tone and pauses that guide the audience through the speech, much like the smooth flow of a river.

4. Optimizing Pathway to Enhancing Public Speech Ability

Public speaking is an essential skill that plays a pivotal role in personal and professional development. It is crucial for universities, educators, and students to recognize its importance, collaborate, and work together to design an effective strategy for improving public speaking abilities among students.

4.1 Universities and Educators: Actively Building Platforms

Educational institutions must play an active role in providing platforms for students to develop their public speech ability, both within formal courses and extracurricular activities. Although the importance of public speaking is widely acknowledged, many students may not fully recognize its value, or they may struggle to engage in speaking exercises without the right motivation, encouragement, or conducive environment. Therefore, universities should reform their curriculum and offer more opportunities for students to practice speaking [4]. One effective approach is to introduce diverse forms of

practical exercises, such as case studies, debates, discussions, and speeches, which simulate real-world scenarios. These activities allow students to develop their public speaking and oratory skills in a controlled setting. By giving students ample opportunities to speak—whether in mock interviews, morning meetings, or debate competitions—they can refine their skills in a variety of contexts that align with their interests [5]. Moreover, educators should design events and cultivate an atmosphere on campus where public speaking is celebrated, practiced, and enjoyed by all students. This encourages a campus culture where every student is motivated to engage in speaking activities.

I have personally implemented a successful initiative in this area, which has yielded positive results. Through a second-classroom initiative, I introduced a course titled *Public Speaking and Etiquette*, aimed at enhancing students' public speaking, teamwork, and aesthetic skills. The course runs twice per semester and consists of five distinct modules: Module One: "Public Speech ability". This module focuses on lectures and video analysis to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of public speaking techniques, essential skills, and the structure of successful speeches. It also addresses common "fears" and "discomforts" related to speaking in public.

Module Two: "Etiquette and Image Design". Combining practical teaching such as explanation, demonstration and on-site instruction with traditional Chinese cultural insights, this module teaches students basic social etiquette and the principles of effective image design, fostering a sense of cultural confidence and awareness.

Module Three: "Experiential Speaking". In this hands-on module, students choose their own topics and deliver 3-minute speeches, receiving live feedback from the instructor. This experiential approach allows students to "learn by doing" and develop their potential.

Module Four: "Speech Competition". Students compete in speech contests based on a set theme, with prizes awarded to the top three speakers. This competitive format motivates students to refine their skills through practice, helping them enhance both their presentation abilities and their emotional connection with the audience.

Module Five: “The Ultimate Showdown”. The final module involves a major competition in which the top students from each session compete for the title of the most skilled orator. The preparation process is not only about mastering traditional knowledge but also about expanding students’ thinking and enhancing their creativity [6].

To date, the *Public Speaking and Etiquette* course has successfully trained over 400 students. Participants consistently report that the course has not only equipped them with essential public speaking knowledge and skills but also significantly boosted their confidence and willingness to speak in front of an audience.

4.2 Building Confidence and Overcoming Fear

The primary barrier many individuals face when speaking publicly is a lack of confidence and the fear of failure. This fear—whether of making mistakes, losing face, or being judged—is common and often crippling. University students, in particular, need to understand that they are not alone in experiencing this anxiety. In fact, many public figures, including historical leaders like Winston Churchill, also struggled with public speaking fear. To overcome this challenge, students must first become thoroughly familiar with their speech content. The more deeply one understands the material, the easier it becomes to speak about it confidently, as familiarity breeds assurance and diminishes fear. In addition to mastery of the content, rehearsal plays a critical role in building confidence. The more often students practice, and the more closely their practice mimics the real speaking environment, the more confident the speaker will feel when giving a formal speech.

4.3 Expanding Knowledge and Building a Strong Knowledge Base

Public speaking is a comprehensive reflection of a person’s character, talent, knowledge, insight, and courage. A successful speech must be substantive and meaningful, which requires the speaker to have a solid knowledge base. Without it, a speech becomes hollow and uninspiring, akin to a river without a source. During their university years, students should focus on strengthening their foundational

knowledge in their chosen field while actively participating in social practice, volunteer work, and professional competitions. These experiences not only enrich understanding and broaden horizons but also cultivate an open mind and strategic perspective, all of which significantly enhance one’s speaking abilities.

4.4 Developing Storytelling Skills

In a speech, facts and arguments play a relatively minor role compared to engaging stories and vivid examples. In essence, public speaking is often about using compelling stories to convey ideas. University students should master the art of storytelling, as well-structured and emotionally charged narratives can strongly influence an audience’s feelings and perceptions. Presenting findings or addressing issues through storytelling not only makes the content more engaging but also ensures the message is communicated effectively. Stories create a sense of connection and make the audience more receptive to the speaker’s ideas. Moreover, storytelling is an essential skill during job interviews, particularly in behavioral interviews, where candidates are often evaluated based on the stories they share about their experiences. This highlights the importance of storytelling as a core competency for university students, not just in speeches but also in navigating professional opportunities.

4.5 Seizing Every Opportunity for Practice

Improving public Speech ability is a gradual process that requires persistent effort, progressing step by step from simple to more complex tasks [7]. The most critical factor in enhancing these skills is to seize every opportunity for practice. As the saying goes, “Practice makes perfect.” Students can hone their speaking abilities by answering questions in class, participating in extracurricular activities, or running for student leadership positions. In addition, practicing in front of a mirror or recording oneself to simulate real speaking scenarios can be highly beneficial. Observing one’s image in the mirror or on video allows students to assess their posture, expressions, and overall delivery. These consistent exercises, when maintained over time, can greatly contribute to building confidence and improving the effectiveness of

public speaking.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the ability of university students to engage in public speaking is of paramount importance. Higher education institutions and educators must be proactive in creating structured, well-planned, and supportive platforms that provide the necessary conditions for students to enhance their Speech ability. At the same time, students themselves must take initiative, valuing the precious time they have during their university years. Students should focus on improving their overall competencies, including public speaking, to confidently adapt to the pace and demands of the professional world. By doing so, they will be better positioned to stand out in the competitive social landscape, contribute significantly to societal progress, and ultimately realize their life's ambitions and lofty aspirations.

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