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DEVELOPING THE PRESENTATION SKILLS IN ORAL
COMMUNICATION OF M.C.SC CANDIDATES AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF COMPUTER STUDIES, YANGON

by

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Abstract

The objective of this research paper is to enhance the presentation skills in oral communication of the students at the University of Computer Studies, Yangon, and to gain the students' confidence. Oral communication is an essential role in any academic or professional world. In oral communication, oral presentation takes place in everywhere and it also plays an essential role in any academic or professional situations. The oral presentation can give a chance to share information and knowledge with each other. It is important for M.C.Sc candidates at the University of Computer Studies, Yangon, because they often attend seminars for their theses and oral presentation skill can help the students a lot. If the students have more and more confidence, it's sure that they will make effective and successful presentations. To present successful presentation, it depends on the ability of the presenter, who needs to be skilful in planning, organising, and delivering a topic effectively, fluently and confidently in any situation. It is hoped that this research paper will provide for the development of the presentation skills of anyone who wants to make presentations.

Key words: Communication, Presentation, Purposes, Features, Skills

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1. Introduction

This research paper is intended for the M.C.Sc students to help them attend seminars for their theses and to promote their oral fluency. Oral communication plays an essential role among human beings. In oral communication, especially, it is considered that the presentation skill is the most important for the M.C.Sc students and others. It is noted that the presentation skill is the most useful thing in any situation such as academic or professional situations. Oral

communication is the verbal and non-verbal interaction with an audience to share thoughts, information, and feelings. To speak fluently and confidently in different situations is a central human need and an essential goal of education.

Most of the students are silent in public speaking because they feel anxiety when they think about giving speeches. Teachers have to encourage the students who are afraid of giving speeches. Listening native speakers' speeches in every leisure time can give the opportunity to develop their presentation skills, to increase their confidence and to improve their pronunciation. Nowadays, our country, Myanmar, is a member of ASEAN countries and the teaching staff and all the researchers working under the Ministry of Science and Technology need to have presentation skills because they frequently attend the meetings, seminars, workshops and conferences held among the ASEAN countries. On these occasions, they may have to read papers, discuss some topics and matters, and exchange information on techniques and technical know-how. Therefore, the presentation skills should properly be enhanced for effective presentation.

In this paper, how to develop the presentation skills in oral communication for the M.C.Sc candidates at the University of Computer Studies, Yangon, will be discussed. All the M.C.Sc candidates often attend seminars for their papers, so they need to develop their presentation skills. Therefore, in this paper, the presentation skill is emphasised in oral communication.

2. Literature Review

In order to develop the presentation skills in oral communication, it is necessary to study the brief description of communication, the importance of oral communication, different purposes of oral presentation and some important features of oral presentation.

2.1 Description of Communication

Everyone communicates in a variety of ways. Communication is the process of transferring ideas or thoughts from one person to another for the purpose of creating understanding in the thinking of the person receiving the communication. Sometimes people communicate orally, other times in writing. Communication is the process of sending and receiving verbal and non-verbal messages to create shared meaning. Speech communication is defined as a process involving the symbolic relationship between a communicator and one or more receivers, through the use of oral-verbal and non-verbal messages. Communication is not a static phenomenon. It is a dynamic, ongoing, and continuous process. Gerald Miller, a

noted communication scholar, has said that communication "refers to a way of perceiving and responding to the world in which people live". The communication is successful when the sender and receiver achieve mutual understanding regarding the topic discussed.

Communication is both verbal and non-verbal. Verbal messages are made up of spoken words. Non-verbal messages are the signals sent by any other means, such as with people's hands, body, face and eyes. Finally, prior experiences and cultural background, as well as expectations, influence the meaning people attach to a particular message.

2.1.1 Key Factors in Successful Communication

There are six factors in successful communication: conceiving the message, encoding the message, selecting the communication channel, decoding the message, interpreting the message and feedback.

2.1.1.1 Conceiving the message

The communicator should consider the best means of getting their message across and remember that timing is important. He or she should study his or her recipient(s) carefully and pitch his or her message to suit their particular needs.

2.1.1.2 Encoding the message

The communicator should choose the medium (or media mix) in which to encode his or her message thoughtfully. Graphics and pictures have immediacy and can be emotive; words and numbers convey detail but may be dull; the spoken word is fast but may leave no record.

2.1.1.3 Selecting the communication channel

The Information Technology revolution in electronic office equipment has made an array of telecommunication channels available – computerised telephones, mobile phones and pagers, fax, electronic mail, etc. alongside their traditional paper-based counterparts. All embrace a trade-off between speed, cost, simultaneous receipt of message, confidentiality and so on. So, someone makes sure he or she has made an intelligent decision on channel selection before dispatching his or her message.

2.1.1.4 Decoding the message

The spate of messages arriving in offices has grown enormously in the past ten years. Thoughtful systems are therefore necessary today to ensure that important incoming

messages are given the priority they deserve, that all messages are routed promptly and that time is taken to absorb their meaning. This implies that the receiver is equipped to understand, perhaps, abstruse and technical jargon.

2.1.1.5 Interpreting the message

As a result of the subtle and, indeed, sometimes devious relationships which exist between human beings, the explicit or overt meaning of a received message may conceal a hidden meaning.

In such ways, superficial feelings are phrased – consciously or unconsciously – to reveal underlying ones. And people often communicate in a kind of code which is meant to exclude others not part of an inner circle. It is always important therefore for the message receiver to devote sufficient time and reflection to ensuring that incoming messages are interpreted correctly.

2.1.1.6 Feedback

Unless the sender is provided with prompt and unambiguous feedback, then the communication process is likely to be frustrated. The receiver, then, however busy, must take immediate steps to provide feedback. For example, person-to-person oral communication and written messages.

2.1.2 The Process of Communication

Communication is the process of creating or sharing meaning in informal conversation, group interaction, or public speaking. To understand how this process works, its essential elements are described: participants (who), messages (what), context (where), channels (how), interference (distractions), and feedback (reaction).

2.1.2.1 Participants

The participants are the individuals who assume the roles of senders and receivers during an interaction. As senders, participants form and transmit messages using verbal symbols and non-verbal behaviour. As receivers, they interpret the messages and behaviours that have been transmitted to them.

2.1.2.2 Messages

Messages are the verbal utterances and non-verbal behaviour to which meanings is attributed during communication. To understand how messages are created and received,

people need to understand meanings, symbols, encoding and decoding, and form or organization.

(i) Meanings

Meanings include the thoughts in one person's mind as well as interpretations one makes of another's message. Meanings refer to the ways that communicators make sense of messages. It is important to realize that meanings are not transferred from one person to another, but are created together in an exchange. Some communication settings enable participants to verify that they have shared meanings.

(ii) Symbols

Symbols are words, sounds, and actions that seek to represent specific ideas and feelings. As the presenter speaks, he or she chooses word symbols to express his or her meaning.

(iii) Encoding and decoding

Encoding is the process of putting writer's thoughts and feelings into words and non-verbal cues. Decoding is the process of interpreting another's message. Ordinarily someone does not consciously think about either the encoding or the decoding process.

(iv) Form or organisation

When the meaning people wish to share is complex, they may need to organise it in sections or in a certain order. Message form is especially important when one person talks without interruption for a relatively long time, such as in a public speech or when reporting an event to a colleague to work.

2.1.2.3 Contexts

Context is the setting in which a communication encounter occurs, including what precedes and follows what is said. The context affects the expectations of the participants, the meaning these participants derive, and their subsequent behaviour. Context includes the followings:

(i) Physical context

The physical context includes its location, the environmental conditions (temperature, lighting, and noise level), the distance between communicators, seating arrangements, and time of day.

(ii) Social context

The social context is the nature of relationship that may already exist between the participants. Whether communication takes place among family members, friends, acquaintances, work associates, or strangers influences what and how messages are formed, shared, and interpreted.

(iii) Historical context

The historical context is the background provided by previous communication episodes between the participants. It influences understandings in the current encounter.

(iv) Psychological context

The psychological context includes the moods and feelings each person brings to the interpersonal encounter.

(v) Cultural context

The cultural context includes the values, attitudes, beliefs, orientations, and underlying assumptions prevalent among people in a society. Culture penetrates into every aspect of people's lives, affecting how they think, talk and behave. When two people from different cultures interact, misunderstandings may occur because of the cultural variation between them.

2.1.2.4 Channels

Channels are the pathways through which messages are communicated between sender and receiver. Oral communication uses multiple channels; however, the most common channels are the auditory channel and the visual channel. The visual channel is what the receivers see. The auditory channel is what the listeners hear.

2.1.2.5 Interference

Interference is any barrier to the communication transaction. External or internal interference distracts listeners from the message. External interference refers to barriers occurring outside the speaker or listeners, and may be auditory or visual. External visual interference may occur when a classmate enters the room while the speaker is presenting his or her speech, when a police officer makes an arrest outside his or her classroom window, or when audience members are passing notes.

It is not always possible to eliminate external interference, but effective public speakers attempt to reduce its potential impact. Good speakers also modify their delivery to reduce the potential for internal interference, which may be physical or psychological and may occur within the speaker as well as within the listeners.

Effective public speakers should limit the potential of external and internal interference that can impede listener's understanding.

2.1.2.6 Feedback

Feedback refers to the reactions and responses to messages that indicate to the sender whether and how that message was heard, seen, and interpreted. Feedback can be expressed verbally through words or non-verbally through body language. Feedback is given continuously when one is listening to another, if only by paying attention, giving a confused look, or showing signs of boredom.

2.1.3 Differences between Oral and Written Communication

Attention to and practice in either speaking or writing will have a helpful effect on the other. Good writing should have the vitality of spoken language, and the speaker can benefit from making a conscious effort to improve his or her vocabulary and to use correct grammatical construction. For both speaking and writing, language should be clear, vivid, and appropriate.

Oral communication is characterised by (1) short words, (2) a moderate to high level of repetition, (3) concrete terms, and (4) the use of contractions. Speaking and listening are the communication skills people use most. Given a choice, most people would rather talk to each other than write to each other. Talking takes less time and does not involve composing, typing, editing, retyping, duplicating, and distributing the message.

More important, oral communication provides the opportunity for feedback. When people communicate orally, they are able to interact. They can ask questions and test their understanding of the message; they can share ideas and work together to solve problems.

Books, manuscripts, and printed material make use of the written communication. If someone looks at the pages of this or any other book, he or she will notice that the written words differ from the way people talk. The statements are longer and more complicated, and because people can go back and reread them, there is less repetition. The writer is more formal, less direct. The writer can deal with subjects that are more complex or abstract than can the speaker.

In short the speaker enjoys a major advantage over the writer because of the direct relationship between the speaker and the audience.

2.1.4 The Importance of Oral Communication

People in the business and professional worlds clearly acknowledge the important role that oral and written communication play in their day-to-day routine. Professionals and business people in companies ranging from McDonnell Douglas, Shell Oil, and the Monsanto company to small, single-owner retail business believe that the major cause of work-related troubles is communication.

The role of communication, particularly persuasive communication, is also crucial for the scientist. As the institutional character of science grows and the scientific aspects of work in institutions become more important, researchers will need better communicative capabilities.

Cushman and King emphasise the importance of oral communication. In the final analysis it is the innovative, adaptable, flexible, efficient, and rapid use of information and communication which allows an organisation to reorient rapidly and successfully in a volatile business environment. Oral communication skills have, in fact, been found to be the second most job skill by the American Society of Personnel Administrators. Even Business colleges have begun to recognise the importance of communication skills in business success and many have begun to offer their own communication classes.

The importance of improving communication skills in the business environment cannot be overestimated. Many employees already have effective communication skills that they have learned through school or through their own personal efforts. Others, however, have a long way to go. Employers should develop ways to assess these skills and to provide appropriate training where necessary.

2.2 What Oral Presentation Is

According to Nick Brieger and Jeremy Comfort, an oral presentation is a prepared talk given by a speaker (the transmitter) to one or more listeners (the receivers). To be effective, the speaker's message must pass to the listeners – it must be heard and correctly understood.

Making a good oral presentation is an art that involves attention to the needs of the speaker's audience, careful planning, and attention to delivery.

Jeffrey J. Fox defines presentation as "something offered or given, a descriptive or persuasive account, for the attention of the mind". When someone thinks of a presentation as a gift, it takes on a new meaning. As a presenter, he or she should offer a gift for the mind.

In this discussion, the writer is defining a presentation as different from a speech. He or she thinks of a presentation as a "working speech". It is a practical, content-driver, specific, detailed treatment of a topic. A presentation focuses on informing. The information helps the audience. It educates, provokes discussions, creates debate, enhances decisions, or sells a product or service. Very often a presentation includes visual materials such as slides, charts, blueprints, presentation books, work sheets, brochures, and samples, as well as demonstrations, role-play, music, or some type of audience experience. The presenter has many audiences and gives many types of presentations. That is why the speaker needs to develop this most basic skill.

Presentations are similar to speeches in some ways. As with a speech, the focus of a presentation must be the speaker's audience. Sometimes he or she does not know much about his or her audience. The presenter needs to know so he or she can create a presentation that interests them.

2.2.1 Different Purposes in Oral Presentation

There are three main purposes in oral presentation: the informative purpose, the persuasive purpose and the ceremonial purpose.

2.2.1.1 The informative purpose

The primary purpose is to share knowledge and create mutual understanding. Informative speaking shares knowledge with listeners by answering questions such as "who", "when", "what", "where", "why", "how to", and "how does". Informative speakers are essentially teachers who answer questions about objects, events, places, people, processes, procedures, concepts, or issues.

The informative speaker's goal is to help listeners understand a topic in the same way the speaker does by shaping their perceptions of the topic and what they need to know about it.

Informative speeches are about people, objects, places, events, processes, concepts, conditions, and issues. Regardless of the topic, it is important to design the speech so that the introduction contains an attention getter and a clear goal, or thesis statement. This enables the audience to know where the speaker is going. The goal statement must be specific and

include the word inform. The goal statement is followed by the enumerated preview – the topics that will be covered in the speech.

How an informative speech is organised depends on the topic and specific goal. Common schemes include chronological, topical, casual, and spatial. Some informative speeches take a problem-solving approach, although that style is used more often to organise persuasive speeches.

2.2.1.2 The Persuasive purpose

Persuasion is the process of influencing other people's attitudes, beliefs, values, or behaviours. Persuasive speaking is the process of influencing attitudes, beliefs, values, or behaviours through a public speech. Of all the aspects of public speaking, persuasion is the most complex and the most difficult. The persuasive speaker develops an argument in support of a position on a topic. The persuasive speaker, but in addition hopes to influence listeners to agree with a position and sometimes to take action as a result.

Persuasive speakers want to lead listeners toward agreement. But the agreement must be voluntary and not based on threats. Persuasive speaking is the most complex and challenging kind of public speaking but potentially the most rewarding. Effective persuasive speaking is important for a speaker and it can also force reevaluation of the speaker's positions, as well as improve his or her ability to defend them. Finally, being able to judge how well others use persuasive speaking techniques can help the presenter improve his or her own effectiveness as a persuasive speaker.

2.2.1.3 The Ceremonial purpose

Special events often require public ceremonies characterised by speechmaking. A luncheon for presenting a new executive of an organisation or rewarding a long-time employee for exemplary service calls for a public presentation. A speech whose purpose is primarily ceremonial concerns the exchange of information about the specific occasion and the people involved in the situation. As Wayne Minnick points out, "The speaker does not aim primarily at increasing the audience's knowledge or changing their attitude, but seeks to perform a ceremonial function that calls for the stimulation of the audience's feelings and a heightened awareness of their reason for assembling". The occasion or ceremonial function determines what message content is appropriate. Speeches to entertain – that is, ones intended to humour or bring personal pleasure to an audience – are usually considered ceremonial.

2.2.2 Some Important Features of Oral Presentation

Some important features of oral presentation are: using visual aids, analysing audiences, selecting the topic, using language and organising the speech.

2.2.2.1 Using visual aids

Presentational aids help explain the ideas in a speech. They are usually visual, audio, or audiovisual. Visual aids include actual objects, models, photographs, drawings and diagrams, graphs, and charts. Audio aids focus on sound and include things such as musical recordings, conversations, interviews, speeches, and environmental sounds. Audiovisual aids, such as videotapes and computer-generated slide show presentations, combine sight and sound. Occasionally, presentational aids appeal to the other senses of touch, smell, and taste.

By supplementing words, presentational aids make ideas more concrete and clear for listeners (e.g., Mitchell, 1987). By using presentational aids, people understand things better when they can actually see or hear them. Presentational slide shows such as those constructed on software like PowerPoint have become essential for successful public speaking in business. Studies suggest that presenters who use good computer-generated slide shows are rated as 43 percent more persuasive than those who do not (Antonoff, 1990). The problem is that many people do not have the training to create effective slide shows (Booher, 2003).

Using visual aids can enhance a speech and this can help message clarify. And then, presentational aids increase listener retention and convey information concisely.

2.2.2.2 Analysing audiences

The audience analysis always plays a major role in the organisational process. That information helps speakers to gauge the level of the audience's knowledge. Sometimes, there is a tendency to overestimate that level but the presenter should not automatically assume that audience members know what he or she is talking about. If the presenter give an informative speech, he or she likely will have had some personal experience with the topic and have supplemented that knowledge with further research into the area. This stands the speaker in good stead to offer his or her insight.

The speaker's audience analysis also helps him or her to decide what information will be most interesting to listeners. The presenter can include facts, statistics, and stories that relate directly to them and this works to make the presentation come alive.

2.2.2.3 Selecting the topic

The first step in speechmaking is choosing a topic. Usually the speech topic is determined by the occasion, the audience, and the speaker's qualifications. In a public

speaking class the situation is different. Most of the presenter's speech assignments will not come with a designated topic. When the presenter chooses a topic, he or she should select the topic which is not very easy and very difficult for the audience. And then, the presenter should also choose the topic which the audience can be interested. If the speaker gets the audiences' interest, the topic he or she presents can go away with the audience after the presentation and can inform the listeners effectively.

2.2.2.4 Using language

Using language is one of the important factors in oral presentation. If the presenter uses many long sentences, more appropriate to a paper than to a speech, and many technical terms, although the content is interesting, the audience find the speech difficult and boring. Specifics of the nature of language and its implications for speakers are given by looking at three major goals of language and style – clarity, vividness, and inclusion – and strategies that can help achieve them.

Carefully chosen words maintain audience interest by increasing the clarity of ideas, arousing emotions, and fostering a sense of inclusion. Language either increases clarity through concrete and descriptive word choices or confuses listeners by being abstract and ambiguous.

2.2.2.5 Organising the speech

Organising the speech is the process of putting the speaker's ideas and information together in a way that will make sense to listeners. It includes speaker credibility, speaker confidence, audience interest, time sequencing which are essential to create well-organised speech. Although every speech should have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, not all speeches that have these components are well organised. Effective speakers organise their main points logically, develop their introduction and conclusion thoroughly, and outline the speech comprehensively. Because the goal of any communication transaction is to make sense to the receivers, clear organisation is always important, and public speaking is no exception. Because listeners must understand the speaker based on hearing his or her ideas only once, it is crucial that they can follow him or her throughout the presentation. Consequently, speech organisation has a unique set of guide lines. Organisational skills will improve not only the speaker's public speeches but also his or her personal and professional life. Clear organisation also helps reduce public speaking anxiety. Well-organised speech not only can maintain the audience's interest, but also can help his or her audience understand and remember what the speaker has said.

3. Data Analysis

According to teaching experiences, it is found that most of the M.C.Sc students are weak in presentation skill. Most of the students are afraid of public speaking when teachers asked them to present the familiar topics. At that time, most of them were silent and they dare not stand up in front of the class. They have got proper knowledge about the topic but they lack confidence. To be a good presenter, it is important to have self-confidence. The M.C.Sc students often attend seminars, therefore, they need to have good presentation skills. To be a good speaker, teachers have to practise in doing speaking activities. If they get plenty of time to practise, they will have a good knowledge in presentation and they can also share their knowledge to others. So, they want to improve presentation skill of English language. They are satisfied with their improvement about their presentation skills. Later, it is hoped that M.C.Sc students will have become good presenters not only in academic world but also in business world.

4. Findings

Observing the presentation skills of the M.C.Sc students at the University of Computer Studies, Yangon, it is found that 80% of the students are weak in this skill.

The M.C.Sc students at the University of Computer Studies, Yangon, in the academic year (2007-2008) are between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-three. They have already had more than ten years exposure to learning English. Most of the students are very interested in English and always try to improve their language skills. Even though they have fairly knowledge of language, most of them dare not present their points of view. Some students do not even stand up in front of the class. It does not mean that they have not got knowledge. They have lack of experience and confidence.

The students express that they need the help of their teachers and they need to practise in improving their presentation skill. They come to know that the presentation skill is very useful not only inside the classroom but also outside the classroom. Most of the teachers are interested in teaching oral presentation skill. The teacher has to try to encourage for improving their students' presentation abilities.

Therefore, some activities such as discussion, simulation, role-play and debate are recommended for their oral presentation skill and competence.

5. Discussions and Recommendations

Oral presentation skill is the most important skill in oral communication and it is one of the most significant features of Science and Technology. The M.C.Sc students at the

University of Computer Studies, Yangon, face oral presentation when they attend seminars for their theses. This skill gives students a lot of benefit both inside and outside the classroom. By applying oral presentation, the students can share their ideas in a thesis. Therefore, the teacher should consider the requirements of the students.

The teacher should always spend a few minutes after an activity discussing it with the class. The students are afraid of presentation activities because they are not familiar with the skill they handle. To cope with such problems, the teacher needs to think about the topic which his or her students will be interested in. Finally, the teacher should ask the students do the activities which are not very simple or very strange once a week. By doing this, they will have got a chance to prepare for their theses or seminars. In additions, the teacher asks them to listen to the tapes or watch movies.

The teacher should encourage students to get confidence in oral presentation skills. Later, they will be competent in their oral presentation skills.

6. Conclusion

Oral presentation skill is very important in oral communication. It is essential in any academic or professional situation. It is considered that this paper will help the M.C.Sc students communicate well. It can also give them an effective and successful oral presentation, the presenter's knowledge, attitudes and skills. The MC.Sc students often attend seminars, therefore, they need to have good presentation skills to present or submit their theses effectively. This skill provides them a lot of benefits not only in educational but also professional field. Oral presentation takes place in everywhere and it is very useful for both academic and business world. The teacher needs to encourage and practise the students to improve their presentation skills, consequently, they can get confidence more and more when they attend seminars. Therefore, in this paper, the importance of communication, oral presentation, purposes and the important features of oral presentation are highlighted.

Finally, it is hoped that this research paper will be appropriate and useful for the candidates who want to develop their presentation skills and want to make an effective and successful presentation.

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