

Development of Cross Curricular Competences in University Classrooms - Public Speaking

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Abstract—The consolidation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in universities has led to significant changes in student training. This paper, part of a Teaching Innovation Project, starts from new training requirements that are fit within Undergraduate Thesis Project, a subject that culminates student learning. Undergraduate Thesis Project is current assessment system that weighs the student acquired training in university education. Students should develop a range of cross curricular competences such as public presentation of ideas, problems and solutions both orally and writing in Undergraduate Thesis Project. Specifically, we intend with our innovation proposal to provide resources that enable university students from Teacher Degree in Education Faculty of University of Extremadura (Spain) to develop the cross curricular competence of public speaking.

Keywords—Interaction, Public Speaking, Student, University.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE implementation of new assessment systems in the university from the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) creation has made changes in university students training. Among them, we highlight the assessment of Undergraduate Thesis Project that is the subject of our proposal. This subject involves the creation of a written work led by a professor, and the presentation of this work to an examining jury that has to assess the student application of competences that are involved in the degree, for the purpose of developing a responsible, comprehensive and self-sufficient behaviour.

The completion of this Undergraduate Thesis Project (hereinafter UTP) includes a series of general, specific and cross curricular competences that students will help to develop and overcome. Perhaps the greatest difficulty or, we dare to say, fear that the students has to solve in the UTP development is the cross curricular competence of public presentation of ideas, problems and solutions both orally and writing in a logic and structured manner, these competences are described

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in UTP programs.

This cross curricular competence of public speaking not only appears at this key moment of university student period but may occur at any point in their lives, whether to present a paper in class to teacher and classmates, to give an opinion at a company meeting, or to make a congress scientific presentation. Many people would like to give his/her opinion or to speak in public but their lack of skills or fear embarrasses them when they have to do it [1]. In addition, we cannot forget that the recipients of this innovation proposal are students of the Education Faculty, and thus to the end of their studies become teachers. This is another reason, given the leader nature that every teacher must exercise, because this skill is necessary to work with groups of people in order to make improvements, transformations and changes in educational practice. If you do not convince, no change initiation is possible.

The philosopher José Antonio Marina [2] in his book *Anatomy of Fear* sees fear as "an anxiety caused by anticipation of danger". Meanwhile, in 1977 and Wallace, Wallechinsky and Wallace [3] published in their first book *The Book of Lists* compile a statistic on people's fears. This statistic identifies the fear of public speaking as first, leaving below this, the fear of disease and fear of death, for example.

Several studies confirm that 20-30 % of university students [4]-[7] have reported great fear of public speaking. To give a public oral opinion or to speak in public is considered by adults and adolescents as one of the most difficult situations [8]-[10].

Bang- Rouhet [11] is of the idea that listening to a speaker you can discover her/his personal story through gestures, the look, the voice volume and intonation. As professors and members of the UTP examining courts, we have shown several reactions when our students have to face with public exposure of a work that is going to received a mark. In this situation we have witnessed reactions such as:

- To avoid eye contact.
- Shakings in hands and legs.
- Sweating of palm hands.
- Shortness of breath.
- Flushed face.
- Loss of concentration.
- Trembling voice.
- Dry mouth.

These symptoms are often the result of fear to be evaluated negatively, not being heard or appreciated, going blank and/or shame from a possible failure. Therefore, the fear of public speaking is understood as a deficiency of public speaking

skills [12].

Nowadays, university students are often in need of describe their work in public to their professors and classmates. As we have previously said, it is a relatively new situation for them where they are exposed to an appraisal which generally receives a mark. Therefore it is expected that a certain level of fear appears in any student who is exposed to this situation. In some cases this level may be excessive for persons and damage significantly their ability to speak in public.

Given this, in the new framework of convergence to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), University must afford young people tools to interact positively with their environment and to insert them in social, labour and cultural life actively. We consider that we have to insert new methodologies that help to contribute development of the cross curricular competence of public speaking.

The ability to public speaking is something that can be learned and improved with practice and self-analysis. Therefore, we consider necessary to address this need through the development of educational experiences in university classrooms where students taking part in the experience obtain successful practices. Our training proposal aims to provide to Education Faculty students the needed resources to make their fear level down when they should speak in public.

II. METHOD

A. Participants and Design

To obtain this purpose, students from Teacher Degree in Education Faculty of University of Extremadura (Spain) took part in a workshop composed of several sessions where is considered every aspect of a presentation, from planning the presentation after we had considered the purpose and target audience, through the visual design of the slides of the presentation software, to the way to prepare the presentation itself, and how to get feedback of the way to do it. After professor explanations workshop, attending students exposed an academic work to put in practice all developed aspects during the workshop and their public speaking was assessed. At the end of the workshop, every student assessed the received training in the workshop through a satisfaction survey.

B. Materials

We used two kinds of materials for the development of this project.

Firstly, we had to gather information and prepare the material that was used in the workshop session development (video, activities...) to improve the skills of public speaking.

Secondly, we designed a questionnaire in order to collect information about received sessions in the workshop that we had just ended: public speaking. This questionnaire was assessed by experts, through focus groups, who judged the ability of the questionnaire to evaluate all the dimensions to be measured.

It is a self-administered questionnaire formed by 14 items that provide information about participant satisfaction about

sessions that they received at the workshop: public speaking. Specifically, these items were grouped into three sections: (1) objectives and contents that were worked in sessions; (2) used methodology and; (3) utility and overall rating of the workshop.

First section, *objectives and contents*, was composed by the following items:

- In these sessions has reached the proposed goal: Improve cross curricular competences of public speaking.
- The contents have been treated according to the objective.
- The duration of the workshop has been appropriated to proposed objective.
- The workshop duration has been appropriated to the developed contents.

Second section, *methodology*, was formed by the following items:

- The developed methodology has been appropriated to the proposed objective.
- The developed methodology has been appropriated to exposed contents.
- The didactic material that was used has been appropriated to achieve the objective of the workshop.
- The methodology has allowed the active participation of the students.

Third section, *utility and overall rating*, was composed by the following items:

- The received workshop is important for my job as a teacher.
- From my point of view as a student, this workshop has been beneficial to me.
- I would recommend this workshop to my friends.
- I would recommend this workshop to my classmates.
- I think the exposition of my work has been better because I received this workshop: public speaking.
- I think this workshop can be assessed positively.

Every item of the questionnaire had several answer options in a Likert [13] type scale with five levels of agreement or disagreement.

To obtain general information of the students who took part on the workshop we added several questions (age, gender, course...).

C. Procedure

Once the participants received the public speaking workshop, they made a presentation in groups from four to six members, using presentation software (free software or software copyright). They displayed an academic work where the aspects that were developed in the workshop were assessed, such as:

- Speech
- Structure
- Exposure
- Visual design
- Time control
- Appropriateness to the audience
- Verbal and non verbal communication...

At the end of work presentation, each participant filled in the satisfaction questionnaire.

To analyze this questionnaire data firstly was considered every section where the questions were framed: (1) objectives and contents, (2) methodology, (3) utility and overall rating.

Secondly, we analyzed every item of the survey. After the analysis we observed the presence frequency of every answer in every question, and therefore we encoded the information and grouped the quantitative data in frequencies and percentages.

Finally, tables were made to synthesize the information and graphic representations of data. Taking this data we could do a descriptive interpretation of the information within the context in which it was collected, in order to draw conclusions.

III. CONCLUSION

The results from the satisfaction survey lead us to discuss the possibility of offering this type of workshop to students of Teacher Degree in order to contribute to the development of cross curricular competence of public speaking, and to enrich their potentialities as teachers.

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