The Challenges of Oral Communication among Moroccan Postgraduate Students of Moulay Ismail University

Meryem Aherrahrou[1], Jamal Koubali, Driss Redouani

Abstract

Very recently, the Ministry of Moroccan Higher Education has started to consider the mastery of English language not only a must for postgraduate students but also a condition for obtaining a doctorate. However, in spite of the great effort made, without doubt, by teachers, learners themselves, scholars, researchers and academic to achieve an acceptable level of English oral communication among current graduates. There remain few challenges and constraints regarding speaking and presenting in an academic context. Thus 65 % of current Moroccan PhD candidates find it very difficult to speak or present their work in English in an international academic communication. Given these concerns, the major aim of this paper is twofold: First, to explore oral communication difficulties faced by postgraduate students from different department of Moulay Ismail University . Second, to examine the impact of the application of certain Neuro- Linguistic Programming (NLP) technologies as a promising tool in enhancing their oral communication competences. To achieve the objective of this study, 120 PhD and Master Students were randomly selected namely from Faculty of Science of Meknes to participate in our work. The obtained results from both the questionnaire and post-test revealed that the use of NLP techniques slightly improved not only students' pronunciation, self-expression, self –confidence but also enhanced their attitudes towards English language learning.

Keywords: Oral communication difficulties, postgraduate students, Neuro-Linguistic Programming

1. Introduction

Over the last five years, the Ministry of Moroccan Higher Education started to consider the mastery of English not only as an absolute perquisite for both recruitment and promotion but also "a condition for obtaining a doctorate" (Lahsan Doudi 2014). However, in spite of the great effort made, without doubt, by teachers, learners, scholars, researchers and academic to achieve an acceptable level of English oral communication among Moroccan ESL learners. There remain few challenges and constraints that prevent or discourage postgraduate students of Moulay Ismail University from speaking and presenting in an academic context. Given these concerns, the major aim of this work is twofold: first to investigate the type of English oral communication difficulties among current Moroccan postgraduate students from different departments of Faculty of Science, Meknes- Morocco; second to explore the effect of the use of some NLP strategies and patterns that are more likely to improve academic speaking skills of the participants of this study.

2. Review of the literature

2.1. Academic Speaking difficulties

Academic Speaking (AS) refers to speaking in an academic context. It primarily aims at enabling students to speak fluently, accurately and appropriately in given academic situation; these academic speaking events could be group discussions, oral presentations, debates, seminars, conferences, workshops and Colloquiums. To name some examples that may prevent or discourage EFL students from speaking in an international communication: lack of spontaneous speaking ability, negative emotions, lack of English knowledge, grammar and pronunciation, mistakes, processing time pressure, self-expression; anxiety, apprehension, nervousness, stress, negative feedback, lack of self-confidence ,classmate, teachers, friends and audience, fear of losing face in front of others, self-perception and attitudes toward language, transfer, lack of L2 vocabulary and structure, false attitude toward L2 and finally lack of opportunities to communicate in L2 inside and outside the class [1]; [2]; [3].

2.2. The link between Academic speaking and NLP?

---

[1] Moulay Ismail University, Morocco

Given this concerns, several studies on NLP applications in ELT have been conducted in an attempt to enhance or develop oral proficiency among non-native university students. For instance, [4] examined the impact of certain NLP techniques in enhancing communicative competence of language teachers in Islamabad. The findings confirmed that NLP strategies have a positive correlation with communicative competence of teachers which in turn benefits the learners. In the same line of thought, [5] diagnosed the problem of 24 Indian rural students in the context of English language learning and then determined the effect of "Technology Enabled Psycho-NLP" model on their spoken English. The obtained results from single group pre-test and post-test revealed that students taught through NLP strategy had significant improvement in spoken English. In a similar view, the obtained results from [6] studies on the effect of NLP in fostering oral communication skills among students of higher education indicated that the application of NLP improve students pronunciation, intonation, stress and more importantly enabled learners to communicate with other in an effective way. Similar findings were supported by a study conducted by [7] on the impact of NLP technology in improving 24 students speaking skills at Madrasah Aliyah Negri 2 Surakartah. Equally important, [8] surveyed the effect of certain NLP techniques on augmenting academic speaking of bachelor and master students in India. The study found that the application of NLP strategies helped students realize the importance of organizing the content of their speech in cohesive manner.

The present study aims at investigating English oral communication difficulties and challenges among postgraduate students from different departments of faculty of science of Moulay Ismail University. Also the purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of certain Neuro-linguistic programming techniques in enhancing academic speaking skills of the participants of this present study. This paper attempted to address the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are the most English oral communication challenges and difficulties faced by Moroccan postgraduate students of Faculty of Science of Moulay Ismail University?

RQ 2: Does the application of certain NLP techniques significantly improve academic speaking skills of postgraduate students of the participants of this study?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The target populations of this study are postgraduate students who studied English language at faculty of science of Moulay Ismail University during academic year 2014-2015 under the supervision of non-governmental organization "Together as one". To meet the challenges of the present study, the researchers handed 178 questionnaires to English language learners from different departments (Biology, Physics, Informatics, Mathematics, Geology, Arabic, Islamic studies, French…). The response rate yielded in (N=120) questionnaires. The participants include (N=47) master students and (N= 73) PhD students who were randomly selected to participate in this work. Their age was about 21 and over 36. Their level of proficiency varies from "not good at all" to "very good". Their contact with English varies between "1- 3 years" to "7-9 years".

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Survey questionnaire

For the purpose of this study an adapted modified questionnaire of [9] and [10] was used to collect the data. It has three parts: demographic, speaking and presenting part. The first part aimed to collect information about students' gender, age, city, and university, level of English and years of learning English. The second part elicits students' speaking difficulties that prevent them from speaking in English language in an academic situation. The third part surveyed factors that affect students' speaking skills; this part ended up with students' suggestions on ways to improve their academic speaking skills.

3.2.2. Post-test

The major aim of this test was to measure 20 PhD and master students' improvement in terms of pronunciation, self-confidence, self –expression after the application of certain NLP techniques. The NLP treatment focuses more on group discussion, oral presentations, discussion, presenting skills of students and it lasts for four months from February to Mai 2015 for about three hours each week.

3.2.3. Data Analysis

The statistical SPSS software version 21 was employed to calculate the collected data. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentage, and cross tabulation were used to answer research question number one. Whereas, paired sample t-test was used to answer research question 2.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Academic Speaking Difficulties
RQ 1:   What are the most English oral communication challenges and difficulties faced by Moroccan postgraduate students of Moulay Ismail University?

The obtained results from the survey questionnaire revealed that (52.5 %) of the participants of this work reported despite the fact that their level of English is quite good (47.5%) they think they do have the ability to do an oral presentation in English, but the fact is that fear of making pronunciation mistakes (39.2%) and fear of teachers' negative feedback (35.0%), self-confidence, lack of vocabulary, lack of speaking opportunities in English prevent them from speaking, presenting or even discussing their work in English language in an academic communication. The analysis of the questionnaire showed that big number of respondents replied they do "quite often" (50%) practice oral communication in the English lesson. Thus (42.5 %) claimed that their English teacher asked them to prepare an oral presentation from time to time, but according to (83.3%) they are not enough to improve their academic speaking skills. It was also found that (34.2%) of postgraduate students rarely speak English with other researchers in and outside their laboratory. Concerning the most important element of speaking the obtained results from students' response indicated that the possession of wide range of vocabulary (25.8%) and clear pronunciation (25.0%) were found to be on the top of the list. However; (20.8%) of them answered that grammatical accuracy is also essential in L2 learning. As far as students speaking in English class (53.3 %) of the participants reported that when they asked to speak in the class they speak spontaneously, whereas, (24.2%) hesitate, (15.8%) make any argument to avoid speaking, and only (6.7%) get embarrassed. Large number of students suggested increasing speaking opportunities; particularly, for PhD students through organizing conferences in English and push them to present and discuss their work in English with other researchers.

4.1.2. Enhancing Students Academic speaking skills through NLP
RQ 2: Does the application of NLP approach significantly improve oral communications incompetence among the participants of this study?

The results of the post-test revealed that NLP treatment / applications have a significance differences of students' improvement in terms of self-expression (p value= 000; mean= -2,300; SD= 1.174), self-confidence (p value= 000, mean= -1.300; SD=, 923) and pronunciation (p value =000; mean= -2.200; SD =, 951). It was found that the speaking skills of the participants of this work had been significantly improved after the applications of NLP approach. It can be concluded that the implementation of certain NLP technologies was found to be effective for improving academic speaking skills of Moulay Ismail University. Figure 1clearly showed how certain academic speaking skills of postgraduate students were much improved after NLP treatment.
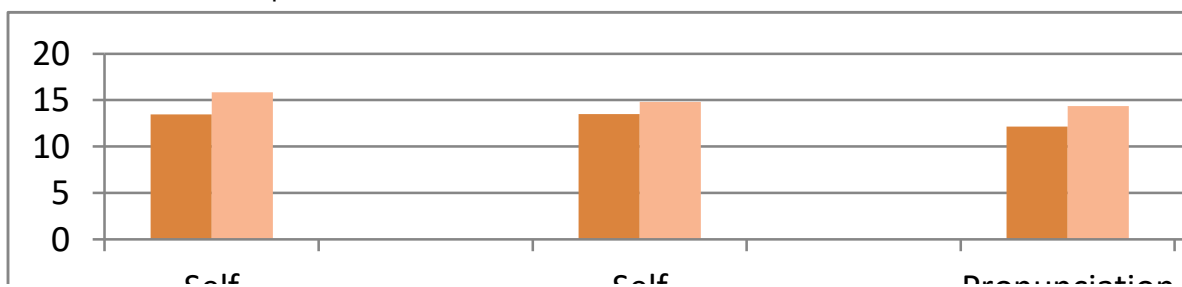

Fig. 1: Academic speaking skills difference before and after the experimentation

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Academic speaking difficulties

Data analysis of this study showed that lack of vocabulary knowledge, self- confidence, lack of speaking opportunities in L2 and fear of making pronunciation mistakes consider to be of the big challenges that postgraduates of Moulay Ismail faced. These findings are supported by [1]; [2] and [3].

4.2.2. Enhancing Academic speaking skills through NLP

The obtained results from post-test indicated that the implementation of NLP strategies on master and PhD students of Moulay Ismail University significantly improved their academic speaking skills. Similar findings found in [4]; [5]; [6]; [7]; [8] and [11] in their research studies on the impact of NLP approach in fostering oral communication skills among tertiary students.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated oral communication challenges among 120 postgraduate students of Moulay Ismail University. It was found that lack of speaking opportunities, fear of making pronunciation mistakes and lack of vocabulary knowledge prevent them from speaking in an academic context. The analysis of the post-test revealed that NLP found to be effective for improving academic speaking skills of 20 postgraduate students namely from faculty of science. More research needs to be conducted on the incorporation of NLP in English language teaching in Moroccan higher education.

References

[1]. Zulkurnain, N., & Kaur, S. (2014). Oral English communication difficulties and coping strategies of Diploma of Hotel Management students at UiTM. 3L; Language, Linguistics and Literature. The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies, 20(3), 93-112.

[2]. Gan, Z. (2012). Understanding L2 Speaking Problems: Implications for ESL Curriculum Development in a Teacher Training Institution in Hong Kong. Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 37(1), 43-59.

[3]. Jamshidnejad, A. (2011). An innovative approach to understanding oral problems in foreign language learning and communication. Journal of Academic and Applied Studies, 1(1), 3-21.

[4]. Yameen, A., & Iftikhar, L., (2014). Neuro-Linguistic Programming as an Instructional Strategy to Enhance Communicative Competence of Language Teachers. Journal of Applied Environmental and Biological Science 4 (7).

[5]. Ramganesh, E., & Paulraj, I. J. M. (2016). Effectiveness of Technology Enabled Psycho-NLP on the Performance of High School Students in Spoken English. Asian Journal of Social Science Studies, 1(2), 37.

[6]. Sarada, PA., & Smrithi RK., (2015). Towards a Neuro- Linguistic Approach for Enhancing oral Communication skills in English among the I.B Tech students. Research Journal of Pharmaceutical, Biological and Chemical Science 6(3).

[7]. Ningsih, M. (2016). Improving Students' Speaking Skill Using Neuro- Linguistic Programming Technique (A Classroom Action Research at the Tenth Grade of MAN 2 Surakarta In 2015/2016 Academic Year). Karya Ilmiah Mahasiswa Progdi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris FKIP, 2(1).

[8]. Salma, A. (2016). Augmenting Academic Speaking at the Tertiary Level through Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP). The Global Journal of English Studies 1(1).

[9]. Zitouni, N. (2013). *The Use of Students' Oral Presentations in Enhancing Speaking Skill in the English Language Classrooms* (Doctoral dissertation, Biskra University).

[10]. Törnqvist, A. (2008). Oral communication in the English language classroom: A study of the attitudes of some English teachers and 9th grade pupils in Sweden towards oral communication in the English classroom.

[11]. Afshari, S., & Ketabi, S. (2016). Current trends and future directions in teaching English pronunciation. International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning, 5(5).