

The Motivational Profile of Students in Initial Teacher Training Regarding their Competence in Oral Communication : the Two First Years' Results of a Longitudinal Study of Four Years.

Priscilla Boyer¹, Vincent Chalifour², Geneviève Messier³, Christian Dumais⁴,
Sylvie Viola⁵

Abstract

A Canadian research on the oral communication competencies of undergraduate teacher in preschool and elementary education in Quebec (Viola, Messier, Dumais and Meunier, 2015) revealed the importance of continuing research on motivational factors related to public speaking of these students. Considering the importance of said competencies for professional development and the role of universities in assisting in its development, we have looked into the motivational profile of students in initial teacher training regarding oral communication. This longitudinal study of four years will allow the observation of the interrelation between motivational factors (self-efficacy, expectancy-value, motivation and the belief about static intelligence) and their role in the students' perseverance in school. To do so, a survey designed and validated by our team is given out to undergraduate students in education of two Canadian universities (n = 619) for each of their four years program. The survey in question and the two first years' study's results will be presented in this conference, which will allow to draw a portrait of the students' motivational profile from the beginning of their undergraduate degree and shed some light on its evolution after one year into the program which include a 2 to 4 weeks internship.

Keywords: *Self-efficacy, motivation, expectancy-value, static intelligence, undergraduate teacher, oral communication;*

1. Problem and Theoretical Framework

Oral communication is essential in the teaching profession; it is one of the competencies that Quebec universities are responsible for developing. In fact, Canadian students living in Quebec and who go to university to become teachers at the elementary, secondary or special education level must develop twelve competencies during their education, including the competency to "communicate clearly and correctly in the language of education, both orally and in writing, in various contexts associated with the profession of teacher" [9 p.69]. To be considered competent in oral communication, the future teacher must know how to act in situations specific to the profession of teacher, but which are also specific to their university education. Students must master types of communication specific to their education (presentations, microlessons, interviews, etc.), as well as types that are specific to the profession (teaching of lessons, reading to others, discussion, etc.), not to mention that they must be able to mobilize an entire array of resources that can be broken down into three components [11] : the linguistic component (voice speed, articulation, range, etc.); the discursive component (content, organization of speech, connecting thread, etc.); and the communication component (management of interactions, level of language, non-verbal communication, etc.).

Since it is public knowledge that the teaching profession is a speaking profession, it can be assumed that the motivational profile of students in regards to oral communication must be strong from the beginning of their university education and that their competency in this area has already been demonstrated. However, many students still have difficulties with it at the end of their academic careers [10] [12], despite the tools available for teaching and evaluating oral competency. Interviews conducted by Viola, Messier, Dumais and Meunier [13] also revealed that some of them reported having had very negative experiences when they were adolescents and that these experiences have had a negative impact on their current ability to engage in public speaking. They have doubts

¹ Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

² Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

³ Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada

⁴ Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

⁵ Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada

regarding their competencies and abilities to be good teachers. What also emerged from these interviews is the fact that certain teaching tools had a negative impact on the motivation of these students, whereas the practicum activities had an opposite positive effect. At least, students seem to place a greater value on the latter.

These results were significant to us and it caused us to focus on the motivational profile of students in their initial teacher training in terms of their oral communication competencies. It is this motivational profile that pushes someone to complete a task, but also to persevere despite the obstacles. Current teaching tools do not take personal factors into account, which are nevertheless important in academic success and which play a mediating role between a person's skills and their ability to act competently [5]. As part of this study, we did opt to focus more specifically on motivation, but we also wanted to look at the feeling of self-efficacy (Bandura's social cognitive theory [1]) and task value (Eccles' expectancy-value model [7] [8]). The feeling of self-efficacy is the belief in one's abilities to effectively complete a task and produce the desired results. As for task value, four variables are taken into account: intrinsic interest, perceived utility, self-image and cost-benefit ratio. These theoretic frameworks regarding motivation were chosen for their importance in the scientific literature and for their efficacy in reporting on complex phenomena in terms of academic motivation [5].

2. Methodology

In this study, we wanted to describe the evolution in the motivational profile of students in initial teacher training in terms of their oral communication competencies. To do this, we chose a mixed methodology that included a survey [4] completed by the participants for each of the four years of their education and semi-structured interviews. Only the survey results from the first two years are presented in this article. Although nearly 600 students participated in the study each year, 387 completed the survey for years 1 and 2. All of them are students from Quebec universities enrolled in initial teacher training. The sample was composed of 79.8% women and 20.2% men, which corresponds to current program statistics.

The survey was subjected to a content validation, an internal structure validation as well as construct validation in the spring of 2016 (n = 403). It included 32 Likert-scale items with 6 levels, providing no neutral choices in order to prevent any central tendency bias. Consistent with the specificity of the feeling of self-efficacy, the items were contextualized in a variety of communication situations taking into account the oral type of communication (oral presentation, discussion, etc.) or the speaker. It also focused on the known objects of the oral competencies of the students (pauses, subject-verb agreement rules, level of language, etc.), which are in line with the three components of the chart by Préfontaine et al. [11].

3. Results

For the purposes of this article, only the scores obtained by students in the three variables for each of the two years are presented (Table 1), which will also enable us to observe the evolution of these variables. It is important to remember that the scores are placed within a range of 1 to 6.

Table 1: Motivation, self-efficacy and expectancy-value for the first and second years of the study

	Motivation		Self-efficacy		Expectancy-value	
First year score between 1 and 6	<i>Score</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>
	4.4	0.9	5.1	0.48	5.07	0.66
Second year score between 1 and 6	<i>Score</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>
	4.3	0.92	5.3	0.42	5	0.67
Comparison between first and second years	T=1.38; ddl=386; ns R=0.76		t=-7.52; ddl=386; p>0.00 R=0.57		T=-2.15; ddl=385;p> 0.05 R=0.55	

As you can see, the motivational profile of students at the beginning of their university education is generally quite high. This is particularly true for their feeling of self-efficacy and the value they give to oral communication skills. The relatively low standard deviation for these two variables provides evidence of a fairly homogeneous population that is moderately to highly confident in its competencies and that feels that oral communication is important. The motivation of students for public speaking seems however somewhat lower, although generally positive. For certain students however, motivation is non-existent: 6.7% of them received a score of 3 or less, saying they had little or no motivation for oral communication, whereas 29.3% exhibited a slightly-positive motivation (score between 3 and 4).

In the second year, we observed little difference in this population. Their motivation hardly changed at all, the difference between the first and second year being non-significant. We did see an improved feeling of self-efficacy in students who seemed to have gained in confidence after their first practicum and their first year of education, but they still placed less value on public speaking.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the results from this first year, it would seem the motivational profile of future teachers enrolling in their undergraduate program is very positive. This finding is not surprising given the importance of self-efficacy beliefs and the value assigned to certain skills when people make their career choices [2]. Such a profile at the beginning of the undergraduate program is a protective factor against the eventual difficulties that students are likely to face [6]. That students are able to maintain this positive profile after their first year of education and first practicum is excellent news. That they are becoming more confident in their ability to successfully engage in their oral communication tasks is generally reassuring to the institutions. However, we must remain vigilant: Bostock & Boon [3] found that the years in the undergraduate education program do not always correlate with an increased feeling of self-efficacy in students. The subsequent years when students must complete two practicums (between 6 and 12 weeks) and will be faced with many oral evaluation situations will be critical.

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