



Improving Employability Skills through Students' Conferences in Foreign Languages

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to analyze the improvement of general skills: confidence, self-motivation and speech characteristics thanks to participating in students' conferences in foreign languages. Ten years' experience of organizing such conferences has been discussed showing ways to succeed in dealing with personal and interpersonal difficulties, in overwhelming negative emotions and low prospective self-evaluation. Retrospective monitoring and self-monitoring have been done proving changes in students' interpersonal and communication skills. Theoretical base for the present research has been self-assessment and reflection. Participation in students' conferences in foreign languages is a challenge demanding more internal work: to prepare the paper and to make an oral presentation of the obtained results a student must overcome psychological problems that s/he does not perceive when speaking the native language. This study is particularly relevant due to the rapidly changing requirements for young specialists with higher education in a situation where the number of graduates exceeds the number of available (released and established) jobs requiring high qualifications. The retro-monitoring shows that graduates having experienced the team training preparing presentations at the conference had developed good employability skills to keep the job, a better adaptability and are ready to manage their life, to change workplace and to study in order to learn a new profession.

1. Introduction

Using foreign language as an instrument in conducting advance in professional life means acquiring communicative skills for research, business, art, science and politics, being ultimately strong ambassadors for the working group, for a project to develop, for a regional environment to protect.

The working experience shows that employability means much more than to have been chosen, it suggests a long efficient work life in an organization and supplementary skills, knowledge and organizational culture giving more flexibility when one has to change workplace (cf.: "more likely to gain employment and to be successful in their chosen occupations" [4]).

The aim of the study is to analyse the improvement of general skills: confidence, self-motivation (in this we follow the self-determination theory [5]) and speech characteristics thanks to participating in students' conferences in foreign languages.

Retrospective monitoring and self-monitoring have been done proving changes in students' interpersonal and communication skills. Theoretical base for the present research has been self-assessment and reflection. This study is based on experimental data obtained by M. Avdonina [1] showing that both adequacy and completeness of self-assessment of the product of speaking activity are not random, and affect with high confidence the success of speaking in a foreign language. Students having an adequate general self-assessment (measured with the J. Nuttin method [5]) and being more critical to the properties of their speech than the experts are in the group of the most successful. Analysis of the linkages between the external evaluation, self-esteem and objective parameters of speaking showed that personality self-esteem and speech self-assessment affect the success of speech. A bit understated speech self-assessment correlates with successful speaking and an inflated one with the low results. The fully done self-assessment correlates with high success of speaking, and the incomplete one with low results. Experiments (56 students) confirmed the relationship and interaction of personality self-evaluation and activity self-evaluation. The low success group of students has been characterized by the lowest linguistic performance, conceiving and foreboding failure together with self-justification; social passivity and obedience. The medium-low success group has been characterized by the use of protective mechanisms (they are reasoners and debaters); incomplete self-assessment; low intensity of the basal needs and obedience. Students who answered questions about their speech incompletely avoided unpleasant truth. Note that the

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adequacy of self-assessment in this case correlated with low success. The medium-high success group has been characterized by good linguistic performance but formal attitude to the task; "zero" fullness of activity self-assessment of many of them, carelessness and a low level of emotionality. The highly successful group has been characterized by the very high linguistic performance; by differentiated and substantiated knowledge of the content and forms of expression, readiness to implement the task with interest, they are critical, understate the own result wanting more, have social boldness.

Ten years' experience of organizing such conferences shows ways to succeed in dealing with personal and interpersonal difficulties, in overwhelming negative emotions and low prospective self-evaluation.

2. Methods and material

Participation in students' conferences in foreign languages is a challenge demanding more internal work: to prepare the paper and to make an oral presentation of the obtained results a student must overcome psychological problems that s/he does not perceive when speaking the native language.

Listening together with the students to a lecture at the Polytechnic Museum of Moscow by Jorge Vagensberg [12], Scientific Director of the "la Caixa" Foundation (Barcelona) we wondered how his ideas are spiritually close to ours: to connect the explanation of laws of universe, sensory perception of its beauty and the admiration of those who opened for us new things about nature, unusual exhibits and interactive technologies.

Here we shall consider several types of student conferences in a foreign language:

- Students' conferences at the Department of learning by correspondence (specialties "Translation Studies" and "Intercultural Communication") of the Moscow State Linguistic University held in French; and events of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia;
- Annual students' conferences "Actual problems of ecology and nature" and International Youth Scientific Conference "People. Science. Innovations in the new millenium" [6] held at the Ecological faculty;
- Scientific conferences in foreign languages "Modern Paradigm of the Scientific Knowledge: Actuality and Prospects" (agriculture and medicine) [2];
- Creative project "The world through the eyes of an interpreter" held by Foreign Languages Department of Agrarian Institute of Technology;

3. Results

The participant must prepare a detailed report on the topic, use different sources of information, talk about research, facts, events; be critical and have his/her opinion on subject; make conclusions.

Normal situation is often seen: a dull report with predictable content, an excessive amount of pictures, almost all of the text is laid out on the slides, the audience does not listen, everyone prepares for performance. It is indeed an individual work with the help of an advisor. The effectiveness of the conference made as a project is based on the following positions:

- 1) Intercultural character of the gathered facts. For example, during the preparation of reports for the conference on the theme "Paris in works of art" students saw that the articles on the same topic, often with the same illustrations can contain different material, as the authors think about a special addressee, so Arc de Triomphe for the Germans connotes with a novel (1945) by Erich Maria Remarque, and a film with Ingrid Bergman (1948), but for Americans the Eternal fire at the Arc de Triomphe makes think about the JFK's visit to France and about Jacqueline Kennedy creating a similar memorial at the burial site of her husband. This work does not involve knowledge of all these languages, but comparing, guessing, and as a result participants are aware of the international significance of this famous site of Paris and see it through different eyes.
- 2) Interdisciplinary integration: training of good use of terminology, use of rhetoric means, use of science-backed strategies to keep attention, clever psychological tricks to make the audience like and remember the presentation, dress code, voice modulations.
- 3) Variability of materials: prints in native and many foreign languages, web sites and collections of audio and video on a selected topic, real objects to display.
- 4) Use of modern information technologies, of new computer applications. Here the team work is really fruitful. For example, the students of the first years, learning French for 5 weeks participated in the 2015 "The world through the eyes of an interpreter" project with the video "Bœuf Bourguignon" [8] filmed by the whole group with the support of the teacher. The text was short and learned by heart. These 17-year old young students have never made such a job before. It is the principle we base the work on: perhaps, such skills of film-making would never be useful in the future profession, but the



idea that entering the University means to be autonomous, means to be self-sufficient is very positive and increase the efficiency of the education. The effect was great, the film-makers were proud, and in six months the video was remade, adding good sub-titles.

5) Being a team. The desire to make another film, to show it to other groups studying other languages made those students make a video for the New Year Eve, "Bûche de Noël" [9] with much more speaking. As parents heard a lot about the first cooking chef-d'oeuvre, they demanded a part of the gâteau to be brought home for degustation. Now they became famous, and a student of the third year invited the group to execute a more difficult task: to film her preparing lavender soap [10]. She was in business for a year, knew a lot about soap and significance of lavender in French culture, wrote an article about it for the 2016 Students' Conference [11]. It was a long day, then some days to mix soundtracks and video. The team has found a special French song "Lavande" by Enrico Macias about the Lavender festivities.

6). Increasing the importance of the conference: for example, after many years of modest existence as a part of the Faculty Scientific Conference, the 2015 one [6] gathered 350 participants, among which 53 professors, doctors and candidates of sciences and 49 post-graduates. The publication of the article in such a prestige company made 61 master's degree students and 117 undergraduates of 20 countries work hard, arrange their articles with great care, be more responsible.

4. Conclusion

This study is particularly relevant due to the rapidly changing requirements for young specialists with higher education in a situation where the number of graduates exceeds the number of available (released and established) jobs requiring high qualifications.

The retro-monitoring shows that graduates having experienced the team training preparing presentations at the conference had developed good employability skills to keep the job, a better adaptability and are ready to manage their life, to change workplace and to study in order to learn a new profession.

Improvement of foreign language communicative and intercultural competence of students as a whole contributes to the individualization of the search techniques of reading and listening skills, word processing, methods of information delivery.

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