TRAINING, PRACTICE, AND ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT'S PUBLIC SPEAKING COMPETENCE IN THE GENERAL HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY MASTER

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Abstract

Introduction. The studies of the future General Health Psychologists (GHP) must comprise two types of competences in terms of European Higher Education Area (EHEA): 1) general competences as professionals in a changing labor context, and 2) specific competences from the Psychologist's professional profile. In this sense, the public speaking forms part of the "Oral and written communication in your own language" competence, one of the most important generic competence in the new EHEA Studies. Furthermore, it is also considered a specific competence in health professions. Despite the high probability to use this competence in different contexts, it has been proven that this competence generates high stress in students and could be, in some cases, an important academic and employability limitation. The public speaking fear and the lack of knowledge/training about how to do a speech are the major barriers in order to do it correctly.

Goals. Through this project we would like to achieve the following goals: 1) To enhance theoretical and practice knowledge about the public speaking competence in the GHP Master’s students, and 2) To enhance the self-efficacy and confidence levels in the GHP Master's students on this specific competence.

Method. We are conducting a pilot study with 30 students, 7 men and 23 women, from the GHP Master at the University of Zaragoza. First, we will conduct a pre-test assessment about public speaking self-efficacy (Public Speaking Self-efficacy Questionnaire) and about the public speaking confidence (Personal Report of Confidence as Speaker Questionnaire). Second, we will organize two workshops: 1) oral communication skills and technical voice practice, and 2) how to structure and deliver speeches. Third, students will start training in different subjects of the GHP Master and the professors will assess the speeches through the ECO Scale. This scale assesses from 1 to 5 points the following variables: facial expression, bodily expression, eye contact, fluency, volume, intonation, and speech content. After the training period, we will assess again all students with the same pre-test questionnaires (post-test) and we will compare the means obtained in the two assessment periods (Student's t-test, p<.05). We will also present a progression chart with the ECO Scale scores.

Results. We hope that the knowledge improvement about how to speak in public contexts combined with the training in different subjects (different contents and professors), it will influence, in a statistically significant manner, the enhancement of the self-efficacy and confidence scores to speak in public contexts. We also hope that the training will improve the ECO Scale scores over time.

Conclusions. In higher education studies, the time spend for developing practical competences (know-how), as in the case of public speaking competence, is comparatively lower than the time spend for developing theoretical knowledge (know-what). The public speaking is a core competence for the professional development of the future GHP and because of that we should ensure its training over the GHP Master studies. We consider that the methodology described in this project could allow positive and objective results because of the specific measures administered and the systematic professor's observation.

Keywords: Innovation, training skills, public speaking competence, General Health Psychology Master, research projects.
**1 INTRODUCTION**

According to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the training of the future General Health Psychologists (GHP) must comprise two types of competences. On one hand, there are the general competences as professionals that they have to develop in a demanding and ever-changing working world. And, on the other hand, there are specific competences related to the Psychologist's professional profile. In this sense, the public speaking forms part of the "Oral and written communication in your own language" competence, one of the most important generic competence in the new EHEA Studies [1]. Furthermore, it is also considered a specific competence in health professions, and especially in future Psychologists, insofar they will have to make use of their oral skills in different and varied situations during their training time and professional activities, such as interviews, group therapies, and oral presentations in general.

Despite the high probability to use this competence in different contexts, it has been proven that this competence generates high stress in students and could be, in some cases, an important academic and working limitation [2]. The fear of public speaking and the lack of knowledge/training about how to do a speech are the major barriers in order to do it correctly and successfully.

Lack of an accurate oral training during all education levels in Spain, where the teaching of oral skills seems to be less considered than the teaching of writing expression and reading comprehension, can be a an explanation for this fact, as well as the lack of tradition in taking oral test in all Spanish academic environment, from primary school to university. However, several surveys recently conducted allow us to conclude that oral skills have to be trained and assessed in graduated and under-graduated students, and that the results are positive and transferable to other contexts [2,3].

Considering all these aforementioned factors, through this project we would like to achieve the following goals: 1) To enhance theoretical and practice knowledge about the public speaking competence in the GHP Master’s students, and 2) To enhance the self-efficacy and confidence levels in the GHP Master's students on this specific competence in order to prepare them for their future professional activities.

As for the more specific goals that we would like to achieve there are the following ones: 1) To enhance to theoretical and practical (linguistic and paralinguistic as well) knowledge about the public speaking competence in the students, and 2) To increase the levels of self-confidence and self-efficacy in public speaking in the students.

**2 METHODOLOGY**

**2.1 Participants**

We conducted a pilot study with 30 students, 7 man and 23 women, from the GHP Master at the University of Zaragoza. Five professors of the GHP Master have participated in the study, one in a main course and four in optative courses.

**2.2 Procedure**

This study is divided in two phases. Phase 1: *Training of the students in oral skills (8 hours), and phase 2: *Practical of the students in oral skills (up to 5 oral presentations).*

In phase 1, we conducted first a pre-test assessment about public speaking self-efficacy through the *Public Speaking Self-efficacy Questionnaire* [4] and about the public speaking confidence through the *Personal Report of Confidence as Speaker Questionnaire- 12* [5] in the students. Second, we organized two complementary workshops. The first one was focused mainly on oral communication skills and technical voice practice (4 hours), while with the second one we sought to teach the students how to structure and deliver speeches and to refresh their knowledge about the academic discourse and the structure of expositive texts (4 hours).

In phase 2, students started the oral training in different courses of the GHP Master and professors assessed the speeches through the *ECO Scale* [6]. After the training period we assessed again all students with the same pre-test questionnaires (post-test).
2.3 Instruments

Public Speaking Self-efficacy Questionnaire [4]. It is composed of 10 items regarding the consciousness of public speaking self-efficacy in the students through a Likert-type scale (from 1: “less ability” to 5: “high ability”). The theoretical lower rate would be 10 and the highest would be 50, being the highest rates the indicator of a higher self-confident. Its psychometric proprieties have been largely demonstrated [3, 4].

Personal Report of Confidence as Speaker Questionnaire- 12 [5]. It is composed of 6 positive items and 6 negative items, measured with a Likert-type scale (from 1: “strongly agree” to 6: “strongly disagree”). The minimum rate is 12, the maximum rate is 72, and the cut-off point is 42. It is corrected by reversing the results of the positive items and adding the results to the negative ones, so the highest rate reveals less self-confidence in public speaking competence. Its psychometric proprieties have been largely demonstrated [5].

ECO Scale [6]. This scale assessed from 1 (“less ability”) to 5 points (“high ability”) the following categories: facial expression, bodily expression, eye contact, fluency, volume, intonation, and speech content. The ECO Scale provides a description of the representative behaviours to observe in each category in order to facilitate the assignment of measuring points.

2.4 Statistical analysis

We calculated the mean and standard deviation of the data provide by the questionnaires in the pre-test and post-test. We compared the means obtained in both assessment periods through the Student's t-test (p<.05). We also presented a progression chart with the ECO Scale scores.

3 RESULTS

All the students but one made oral presentations, so the oral presentation’s mean was 2.16 [range from 0 to 4]. The outcomes of the Public Speaking Self-efficacy Questionnaire [4] and Personal Report of Confidence as Speaker Questionnaire- 12 [5] can be seen in Table 1 and 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Mean, SD and t Student of the Public Speaking Self-efficacy Questionnaire outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test (n=22)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-test (n= 28)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see in Table 1 the mean of self-efficacy in pre-test is over 25 points (from 10 to 50 points) which means that the GHP students have good scores on self-efficacy in public speaking. After the training period, the scores were higher but did not reach statistical significance between pre and post-test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Mean, SD and t Student of the Personal Report of Confidence as Speaker Questionnaire- 12 outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test (n=23)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-test (n= 28)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 show us that the mean of confidence as speaker was over the cut-off point of the instrument (42 points) which means low levels of confidence. After the training period, GHP students decreased their scores bellow the cut-off point. Despite the improvement of the confidence levels we did not find statistical significance between pre and post-test. We also obtained the rate of participants whose results were over 42 in the Personal Report of Confidence as Speaker Questionnaire- 12 [5], both in pre-test and post-test assessment. The rate of cases with more self-confidence issues related to public speaking in the pre-test (>42 points) was 12 (52.2%), while in the post-test it was 14 (50%). These results could be explained because we get different number of participants in pre and post-test.
periods (23 and 28, respectively) so, maybe people with less practice and lower self-confidence participated in the post-test assessment but not in the pre-test assessment.

The means evolution of the ECO Scale categories can be seen in Table 3. As it can be seen, all the items are over 3.5 in a 1 to 5 scale, so the participants’ communicative skills can be considered appropriated. We expected a higher progression of the scores across the presentations but this has not always been the case. This could happen because the content of the different presentations, the professors and the characteristics of the subjects (main course vs optative courses) were also different. The lowest rated items are corporal expression and gesticulation, and thus they will require more future training.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 3. Means of ECO Scale categories over the training period</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporal expression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral presentation 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral presentation 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral presentation 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral presentation 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral presentation 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total means</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 CONCLUSIONS

In higher education studies, the time spent for developing practical competences (know-how), as in the case of public speaking competence, is comparatively lower than the time spent for developing theoretical knowledge (know-what). The public speaking is a core competence for the professional development of the future GHP and because of that we should ensure its training over the GHP Master studies. We consider that the methodology described in this project could allow positive and objective results because of the specific measures administered and the systematic professor’s observation.

The pre-test assessment about public speaking self-efficacy and about public speaking confidence demonstrated that even graduated students as the ones coursing the GHP Master have a high perception about their self-efficacy in public speaking situations that contrast with their severe lack of self-confidence for public speaking. It is thus important for all the students to participate in this kind of study, where they have the chance to improve their oral skills and their self-confidence and self-efficacy about public speaking.

In conclusion, this study shows that assessing the public speaking competence in the frame of the GHP Master is not only possible but also easy, so more practical training related to public speaking should be done along the GHP Master and especially during the whole first academic year.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the Vicerrectorado de Política Académica (Universidad de Zaragoza) the academic and financing support granted to the Project “Training, practice, and assessment of student’s public speaking competence in the General Health Psychology Master” (PIIDUZ_16_078) in order to developed it within the frame of Innovative Teaching Projects Call 2016-2017.

REFERENCES


