



Empowering Voices: A Holistic Approach to Enhance Public Speaking and Elocution Skills in Higher Education

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Abstract

In an increasingly globalized academic and professional landscape, communication skills are central to student success. This paper reports on a seed money project implemented at Department of English (Aided), Nirmala College for Women, Coimbatore, titled Advancing Communication Skills: A Holistic Approach to Public Speaking and Elocution in Higher Education. With a modest budget, the project aimed to enhance English language proficiency, critical thinking, and self-confidence among undergraduate students—particularly first-generation learners—through workshops, and competitions based learning. The outcomes reveal a marked improvement in students' communication competency, confidence, and digital literacy, underscoring the feasibility and impact of low-cost, high-engagement interventions in higher education.

Keywords: public speaking, elocution skills, higher education, communication training, holistic learning approach, peer-led engagement, english language proficiency, speech structuring

Introduction

Communication is not merely a tool of expression but a transformative skill that shapes the careers and enhances the academic growth of students. It is crucial in building leadership skills and negotiating skills. Beyond disciplinary boundaries, clear articulation, meaningful dialogue, and confident self-presentation are no longer supplementary skills but have become essential competencies for the growth and development of an individual in this digitalised world.

Nirmala College for Women, situated in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India, acknowledges the pivotal role of communication proficiency in empowering its diverse student population, which includes a significant cohort of first-generation

learners and individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These students often encounter unique challenges in acquiring and refining the communication skills necessary to survive in higher education. In response to this situation, the researcher undertook a seed money project which centred on advancing communication skills through a holistic approach encompassing public speaking and elocution. This project aimed to equip students with the necessary guidance and opportunities to enhance their confidence, clarity of expression, and overall communication effectiveness.

This research paper presents an empirical investigation into the impact of this intervention on a



cohort of thirty undergraduate students who actively participated in the programme. By examining the changes in their speaking abilities following a series of workshops, activities within the elocution club including speech related competitions, this study seeks to evaluate the efficacy of this multi-faceted approach in fostering gradual improvements in their communication skills.

Context and Rationale

Nirmala College, a reputed women's college in Coimbatore, enrolls a significant number of first-generation learners. Many of these students exhibit academic potential but lack confidence and fluency in oral communication. Recognizing the urgent need for communication skill enhancement in such students, this project sought to provide structured communication training to improve the fluency of the students by offering platforms for practice and performance. In case of any linguistic inhibitions and stage fear among the students, they were resolved through creative solutions. By integrating workshops and other activities within the elocution club, the project offered a multi-pronged approach that emphasized practice-based learning and peer interaction.

Objectives

The following were the specific objectives of the project:

- To improve voice modulation, clarity, and stage presence through expert-led workshops.
- To nurture critical thinking through debates and discussions.
- To provide platforms for articulation via competitions and performances
- To build self-confidence through peer-led engagements.

Methodology

The beneficiaries were thirty undergraduate students selected through an extempore speech screening. Emphasis was placed on diversity—students from English and non-English medium backgrounds, and those with limited prior exposure to public speaking.

The shortlisted students were engaged in the project which span for six months from September 2024 to March 2025 in the following phases:

Month	Activity
September 2024	Planning, student selection, preliminary arrangements
Oct. 2024 – Dec. 2024	Three workshops on speech enhancement techniques
Jan 2025 – March 2025	Elocution related competitions
March 2025	Feedback collection, final evaluation, report drafting and dissemination

Activities Conducted

Workshops that focused on voice modulation, diction, articulation, stress, pause intonation, speech structuring, storytelling, and persuasive speaking were organised at regular intervals. These events offered a wide range of opportunities for the students to get exposed to various speech enhancement exercises and training. The elocution club provided opportunities for the students to facilitate debates, peer review sessions, and creative improvisation platforms. An array of competitions that helped in confidence building and speech refinement were also part of this project. The judges for the aforesaid competitions were drawn from alumni and language experts.

Results and Outcomes

The Outcomes are the testament for the success of any project undertaken with specific goals. The post-project feedback was collected meticulously and the observations of each student progression were noted. Eighty percent of the students showed significant improvement in their confidence level on the stage. Sixty five percent learned the basics of speech structuring and vocal control.

Student Testimonials

Students reported that participation helped them overcome fear, express themselves more clearly in seminars, and feel more confident during their daily discourses. A few students emerged as peer mentors,



leading weekly sessions and helping others with pronunciation and delivery, fostering a supportive learning community.

Discussion

This project exemplifies how targeted initiatives which are carried out systematically though on a small financial scale can bring measurable improvement in essential soft skills. The combination of expert facilitation and peer-led reinforcement proved effective. The digital era also served as a help hand for the students' search for digital tools and platforms to experiment and improvise their speaking ability, thereby increasing their digital literacy.

Limitations

Limitations are inevitable in any project no matter how big or small it is. This project too had its own limitations—Resource constraints limited the duration and number of expert-led sessions which led to slow progressions. Since the students were involved in various academic, cultural and sports activities, finding slots to carry out the activities became a challenge. Initial disinterest and fear among the students were another inhibition which delayed the progress.

Recommendations

The meticulous execution of the agenda of the project led to significant outcomes and based on them few recommendations are registered. Institutionalisation of the elocution club with ongoing support will gradually increase the standard of the speaking skills of the students. A fully equipped language lab can be beneficial in increasing the proficiency of the students. Steps can be taken to integrate such events into curricular and co-curricular offerings.

Conclusion

The project demonstrates that with thoughtful planning, systematic and consistent execution, even

modest initiatives can yield significant returns in learner engagement and empowerment. A holistic approach—blending training, performance, and digital tools—can help students find their voice, literally and figuratively. Such models are especially vital in institutions nurturing the aspirations of first-generation and underprivileged learners.

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