

The Effect of Motivational Public Speaking Training on Oral Skills Achievement of Fifth Graders

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Abstract

This study has investigated the effect of training on motivational public speaking skills on fifth graders' oral skills achievement in a local private school in Beirut. The quantitative approach was adopted where the total number of learners in the study was 48. The sample was divided into two groups, where the control group had 25 learners from a fifth grade class, and the experimental group had 23 learners from another section. The averages of the oral skills achievement grades of both groups were recorded prior to and after the intervention period on the first and second trimesters respectively. The intervention covered two training modules on motivation and public speaking skills from the "Changing Tomorrow" program (VanTassel-Baska & Avery, 2013). The training was implemented for the experimental group over a period of three months. After that, the results were analyzed using independent sample T-tests and paired sample T-tests. The findings showed a statistically significant increase in the oral skills achievement scores of the experimental group.

Key words: motivation, public speaking, achievement, oral skills, fifth graders

Introduction

Motivation is of major concern to educators since it has a direct influence on learning. In particular, motivation, learning, performance, and emotion influence each other in an interrelated cycle. When the learners are motivated, they strive to learn efficiently and thus perform and feel positive about themselves (McGuire & McGuire, 2015). Ambrose et al. remarked that in order for learners to feel motivated, they must sense a value in a goal, be in a nurturing environment, and believe in their ability to achieve that goal (as cited in McGuire & McGuire, 2015).

Motivation has been extensively researched for the past decades as an essential element in second and foreign language learning (Lamb, 2017). Torres (2010) found that not only do the learners' reasons for reading differ, but also their motivational levels and reading behaviors differ across grade levels. However, the research on motivation in the elementary grade levels is limited compared to that for upper grade levels. Al Henaky (2013) noted that the more second-intermediate English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers employed motivational practices, the greater the achievement of their students in English. However, his study was limited to the intermediate level, and similar studies on the elementary level are not abundant. On the other hand research on the promising effects of motivation on language learning is mostly focused on the effects on reading and reading comprehension. Study of the effects of motivation on oral skills in the English learning classroom is still scarce.

There are a number of theories on motivation; however, Lamb (2017) noted that the Self-determination theory (SDT) was among the most dominant motivational theories that were researched in the recent decades. The SDT's crucial insight for teachers is that with adept teaching, they can serve in making their learners' motivation more intrinsic and internalized by making sure that their classrooms fulfil the

needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Brophy (2010) noted that responding to the learners' autonomy needs can be achieved by encouraging the learners to act autonomously and allowing them to make choices. Secondly, responding to learners competence needs can be achieved by emphasizing activities that involve active responses and immediate feedback, integrating games into learning activities, and considering skill variety, task identity, and task significance. Finally, responding to learners' relatedness can be achieved by allowing frequent chances for learners to collaborate with each other, and emphasizing purely cooperative learning tasks. On the other hand, McGuire & McGuire (2015) mentioned around twenty one motivational strategies that work on enhancing the following: autonomy, competence, belonging and relatedness, self-esteem, and involvement and engagement. Among the strategies that enhance autonomy is allowing learners to choose the learning topics; competence strategies including: giving clear expectations and providing targeted feedback; belonging and relatedness strategies involving assigning authentic, real-world projects; self-esteem strategies including discussing emotions and reflecting on previous achievements; and finally, involvement and enjoyment strategies including connecting to the learner's interests.

Henry, Korp, Sundqvist, & Thorsen (2018) found out that among the most common effective motivational strategies in the English classroom of secondary EFL learners in Sweden, are those which involve authentic activities that are culturally relevant. Lamb indicated that among the strategies that seem to be widely favored by teachers and learners are those that include: exhibiting suitable teacher behavior (or acting as a role model), nurturing positive teacher-learner relations, and enhancing learner self-confidence. However, the prominent motivational strategies were mainly based on the insights of skilled teachers of secondary and tertiary levels. Young learners learning behavior is mostly dependent on direct classroom practices where the teacher has a central role (Lamb, 2017).

This study serves in filling the gap in literature by examining the effect of motivational public speaking training on oral skills achievement of grade five elementary school learners. To serve this purpose, two modules that focus on motivation and public speaking skills were taken from "Changing Tomorrow" program (Van Tassel-Baska & Avery, 2013) which was originally intended to develop leadership skills in school learners.

Literature review

Some of the available studies in the elementary level did not directly tackle motivation, however, they were somehow related to elements of the SDT motivational theory (Lamb, 2017) in addition to self-esteem and engagement, which were considered as linked to motivation by McGuire & McGuire (2015). In short, these studies have shown some promising effects on learning in general and reading in

particular. Guay, Marsh, & Boivin (2003) found that there was a reciprocal effect between academic self-concept and academic achievement among learners from grades 2, 3, and 4. Similarly, in their short-term longitudinal study, Quirk, Schwanenflugel, & Webb (2009) found evidence for a reciprocal model between second graders' reading fluency and reading self-concept over the school year. It was suggested that learners' reading self-concept starts to affect their reading achievement as early as second grade. In an elementary school in UK, Gündođdu (2006) found that self-regulated learning happens when the teacher acts as the facilitator of knowledge, promotes the learner's self-responsibility, self-confidence and self-direction and provides a learner-centered classroom which allows the independence or autonomy of learners. Kitsantas, Steen, & Huie (2009) found that previous achievement and use of self-regulated strategies have an effect on fifth graders' general academic achievement.

Other studies that directly studied motivation included its relations with reading comprehension, learning environment, and engagement. Middleton (2011) studied the relation between reading motivation and reading comprehension on a sample of 421 twin 6-year-old pairs. The findings revealed that genetic as well as environmental factors accounted for both reading motivation and reading comprehension. Furthermore, the covariance between reading motivation and reading comprehension was not only due to genetic routes, but also non-shared environmental routes. Oga-Baldwin, Nakata, Parker, & Ryan (2017) determined that there is a positive dynamic relationship among motivation, insights of the learning environment, and engagement in Japanese public elementary schools. In another Japanese study over the period of a semester in a fifth-grade classroom, Oga-Baldwin, Quint, & Yoshiyuki (2017) found that engagement significantly predicted more adaptive intrinsic motivation and negatively predicted more extrinsic motivation.

There is evidence in the research literature that motivational variables affect language achievement more than Math achievement. Weber, Lu, Shi, & Spinath (2013) examined the roles of cognitive and motivational variables on school achievement of fourth graders in a German elementary school. It was found that cognitive variables (working memory, intelligence) were responsible for Math achievement, whereas motivational variables (self-perceived ability, intrinsic value) were better predictors for German language achievement. In another German study, the native and immigrant learners, from grades 5 to 7, were compared in terms of direction and strength of the relation between intrinsic reading motivation and reading competence. The findings implied that intrinsic reading motivation appeared to be critical for the development of reading achievement for native learners but not of that significance for immigrant learners (Miyamoto, Pfof, & Artelt, 2018). This can be explained by having the German language more relevant to the native learners rather than the immigrants; thus, the need for relatedness – based on SDT- may not be satisfied for the immigrant learners.

Research on the development of public speaking abilities among elementary school learners is rare. Herbein, Golle, Tibus, Schiefer, Trautwein, & Zettler (2018) examined the effects of a training program, which consisted of 12 units targeting speech anxiety, nonverbal communication, and comprehensibility, on public speaking skills and speech anxiety of elementary school learners. The results showed positive effects of the training in provoking better speech in terms of nonverbal and organizational skills but not speech anxiety.

Statement of Research Question

Having noted a gap in the literature in finding evidence for the effects of motivation on promoting the oral skills of learners, especially at the elementary level, this study serves in filling the gap in literature by examining the effect of motivational public speaking training on oral skills achievement of fifth grade elementary school learners. In particular, this research aims at answering the following research question:

Does the training on motivational public speaking from the “Changing Tomorrow” program improve the fifth graders’ oral skills achievement?

Method

This study employs a quantitative method which is based on a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design in which motivation and public speaking lessons were implemented on the experimental group. It is quantitative research since it employs the use of quantitative data which are the average oral skills scores of the target learners. On the other hand, the quasi-experimental design was chosen because it is used to find the effect of an intervention on a target population without random assignment.

Participants

The study was conducted in a private school in Beirut. The sample was composed of two classes of grade five learners. One class was taken as a control group (N=25), and it was composed of 14 girls and 11 boys. The other class was considered as the experimental group (N= 23), and it had 13 girls and 10 boys.

Variables

The independent variable is the implementation of the motivation and public speaking lessons. The dependent variable is the learners’ achievement in oral skills which is measured by the grades of their daily work.

Measures

The grades of the learners’ achievement in oral skills were considered as the measure. In specific, the oral skills achievement, were measured by the oral skills grade average of the first trimester and second trimester, that is before and after the intervention period.

Procedure

Prior to the implementation phase, the first trimester average of oral skills grades were recorded for both the control and experimental groups. Two lessons of the “Changing Tomorrow” program targeting motivation and public speaking skills were implemented over a three month period.

The objectives of the chosen “Changing Tomorrow” training modules include: understanding the skill of motivation to drive others toward a goal, learning about a number of effective speaking strategies and analyzing their use by a well-known role model to motivate others, and finally, constructing and delivering a speech that applies the learned strategies. The implementation of these lessons involves: large group discussions, connections to own learning experiences, journal writing, reflections, pair and group work, use of technology (internet and videos), and writing and delivering a persuasive speech (Van Tassel-Baska & Avery, 2013).

Samples of the handouts that were used in the training are presented in the following appendices. Appendix A presents a biographical chart of the chosen motivational role model that the students have to fill in. Appendix B presents the “Don’t Give up Now” handout, in which students are supposed to respond to one of the scenarios. Appendix C presents “Six Communication Strategies to Promote Motivation” that students have been introduced to. Finally, Appendix D presents a handout of an analysis that students had to do on a motivational speech that they had listened to.

After the implementation phase, the second trimester average of oral skills grades were recorded for both groups.

Results

The descriptive statistics have revealed the means and standard deviations of both control and experimental groups prior to and after the intervention period. An independent sample t-test was used to check whether the pretest results of the control and the experimental group were the same at the beginning of the study or not. Another independent t-test was done to determine whether the posttest results of both groups were similar or not. Finally, a paired sample t-test was used to indicate whether the intervention was effective or not.

Descriptive Statistics

The means and standard deviations of both the control and experimental groups are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of control and experimental groups

Variable	Pre Achievement		Post Achievement	
	M	SD	M	SD
Control	74.24	10.99	74.08	10.56
Experimental	74.30	10.77	76.22	9.82

It is apparent from Table 1 that the mean scores of both groups prior to the intervention period were almost the same, and after the intervention period the mean score of the experimental group increased by around 2 grades. The standard deviations in both groups prior and after the intervention period were high, which indicates that the scores are away from the mean.

Independent Samples T-test

An independent sample t-test was conducted for the control and experimental group for the pre and posttests. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Independent samples T-test

Control/Experimental	T	DF	p
Pre-Achievement	-.020	46	.98
Post-Achievement	-.724	46	.47

The independent sample t-test did not show a significant difference between the two groups on both pre ($p=0.98$) and post ($p=0.47$) scores. This could be due to having a relatively short range of grades (between 74.24 and 76.22).

Paired Sample T-test

The paired t-test is used to detect if the intervention was effective or not. The paired t-test was employed on both experimental and control group before and after applying the training and the results are displayed in Table 3. If the significance is less than 0.05 ($p<0.05$) then the results of the group differ; otherwise, if the significance is greater than 0.05 ($p>0.05$), then the results did not differ before and after the intervention phase.

Table 3: Paired sample T-test results

Variable	Pre-Post Achievement		
	T	DF	p
Control	.70	24	.49
Experimental	-5.56	22	.00

The pre-post achievement comparison does not show a significant difference in the control group ($p>0.05$). On the other hand, the pre-post achievement comparison of the experimental group shows a significant difference ($p<0.05$). This indicates that the scores of the experimental group have significantly increased after the intervention period.

Discussion

This study has employed two modules on motivation and public speaking from the "Changing Tomorrow" program on fifth graders of a private school in Beirut. The strategies used in the implementation phase match those of SDT in terms of satisfying the learners' needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Lamb, 2017). Moreover, the used strategies are related to those mentioned by Brophy (2010) and McGuire & McGuire (2015) as effective motivational strategies.

The results of this study have answered the proposed research question: The modules from "Changing Tomorrow" program on motivation and public speaking skills have a positive effect on the oral skills scores of the experimental group. This finding supports previous research which detected positive effects of motivational strategies on academic achievement in general (Kitsantas et al. 2009), and language achievement in particular (Middleton, 2011; Weber et al., 2013; Miyamoto et al., 2018). On the other hand, it has filled the gap in literature by providing evidence for promising effects of motivational

strategies on the oral skills achievement of learners in the elementary school, specifically in the fifth grade. In particular, it complements the finding of Al Henaky (2013), who witnessed increased language achievement among intermediate EFL learners, by extending this achievement to elementary EFL learners. Furthermore, this study adds to the results of Herbein et al. (2018) who detected the effectiveness of public speaking training on nonverbal and organizational skills of elementary learners, by supporting the effectiveness of public motivational speaking training on the verbal performance as well.

Conclusion

This study shows positive effects of motivational and public speaking lessons from “Changing Tomorrow” program on the oral skills achievement of fifth graders in a local private school in Beirut. The findings support some of the universal studies and enrich others. However, the study is limited to fifth graders and to the context of Beirut. It was also limited to a short period of three months. Nevertheless, the findings may be used to investigate similar training of motivational public speaking skills on other grade levels, regions, and longer periods of time.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Handout 5.1

Biographical Chart: Bill Gates

Full Name: _____

Lifespan: _____

Early Family Background and Created Family Structure

Personality Characteristics and Areas of Aptitude, Talent, and Interest

Major Career/Professional Events and Accomplishments

Personal Life Themes/Beliefs

Selected Quotations

Awards and Recognition

Appendix 2

Handout 5.2

Don't Give Up Now

Imagine that you are all grown up. Pick one of the following people as your best friend and read the e-mail message he or she has just sent you on your cell phone.

- **The mountain climber:** I am near the top of Mt. Everest. I am cold and tired. The wind is sharp, and the air is thin. My toes are frostbitten; the glare of the sun is blinding. My Sherpa says he will come no further than this point with me. I only have another 500 feet to reach the summit, but I don't think I can make it. Help me!
- **The novelist:** I feel like I have been working on this book my entire life, but I can't find the right way to end the story. I am only a chapter away from finishing the novel, but I must have writer's block. I can't find the ideas or the right words to pull everything together. I wanted this to be my best work, but I am frustrated and stymied. Help me!
- **The scientist:** I have conducted more than 500 experiments in my quest to find a cure for cancer of the pancreas. Every time I get a result that moves me a step forward, I get a new result that moves me a step back. I feel like I am going around in circles. Edward Jenner found a vaccine for smallpox; Jonas Salk found a vaccine for polio. I am just a failure. What is the point of it all? Help me!
- **The composer:** I have spent many years studying musical composers, from Bach and Beethoven to Gershwin and Bernstein. I have even analyzed the musical innovations of The Beatles, Taylor Swift, and Jay-Z. I think I can make an important contribution to modern music with the new symphony I am working on. I have the first two movements completed, but I just can't find the notes and chords that will comprise the third movement and allow me to end the piece with a flourish. I guess I just don't have the talent and energy I need to see it through. Help me!
- **The soldier:** I don't think this war will ever end. It is 100 degrees every day in this pitiful country where my platoon has been sent. I have to carry 40 pounds of armor and equipment as I patrol the perimeter every 8 hours. I can't sleep because of the gunfire and mortars in the night; I have to watch every step I take to avoid the explosive devices that have been planted under the sand by the enemy. I am lonely and exhausted, and I wonder if it is all worth fighting for. Help me!

Now it is your turn to write back. What can you say that will motivate your best friend to keep going or hang in there? Each of these individuals is facing the biggest turning point of his or her life, and you are the person each has called upon to save the day. Make your message count, and choose your words wisely.

Appendix 3

Handout 6.1

Six Communication Strategies to Promote Motivation

1. Build trust in your audience or team.
2. Show confidence, conviction, and enthusiasm.
3. Stay on message, and be clear and precise.
4. Use graphic aids, such as pictures, charts, and graphs, to illustrate and clarify important points.
5. Use stories, metaphors, and symbols to entertain and inspire.
6. Use humor in an appropriate way.

Appendix 4

Handout 6.3

Analyzing the Speech: “Mosquitos, Malaria, and Education”

1. This speech is about trying to solve two big problems. What are these two problems?

2. What is the connection between these two problems that the speaker makes? In other words, why does he cover both problems in his speech?

3. Why is the speaker telling his audience about these two problems? In other words, what does he want to get them to do?

4. What strategies or techniques does the speaker use to motivate the audience to get involved in solving “big problems” like the ones he is describing? (Give at least four strategies.)

5. Did the speaker make you want to help solve big problems in the world?

6. Based on this speech, what is the speaker’s vision about the role of the United States?



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