

A STUDY OF IMPROMPTU SPEECHES AMONG UNDERGRADUATES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

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ABSTRACT

One hundred students taking the TCEE 1371 course – Spoken English for Professionals responded to a questionnaire on Impromptu Speeches which is part of the assessment for the TCEE 1371 course. Ten students and eight teachers were interviewed. This study seeks to investigate the students' fears while delivering an impromptu speech, their opinions on the current assessment method and what strategies they think should be used by their teachers to improve their impromptu speech presentation. For the teachers, the researcher investigated the number of years they have been teaching the course, their opinions on the current assessment method, their comments on the evaluation carried out and the strategies they suggest students can use to enhance their performance in making impromptu speeches. Ten students were also interviewed on their experiences while delivering their impromptu speeches in class and their suggestions on how to improve their impromptu speeches given another chance. The results show that nervousness is their main problem. Other problems include their lack of knowledge of current issues due to their lack of reading, and communication skills in English. Twenty strategies have been suggested to further enhance students' performance in impromptu speeches. This study supports previous research on impromptu speeches by Hsieh, Shu-min (2006), Katchen (1996) and Lehtonen, Jaakko (1982).

Introduction

What is an Impromptu Speech?

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005, p. 750), impromptu means "done without preparation or planning – improvised." The Reader's Digest Word Power Dictionary (1998, p. 426) defines impromptu as, "without preparation or rehearsal; improvised for example: I made an impromptu after-dinner speech." The synonyms provided for "impromptu" by The Oxford Thesaurus (1997, p. 812) are "candid, extemporaneous, offhand, scratch, spur, stopgap and unpremeditated." Dale and Wolf (2006, p. 209) define impromptu speech as "thinking on your feet" and to them this means "being able to organize one's ideas quickly and speak about a subject without advance time to prepare."

We make impromptu speeches all the time, for example when we talk to our friends, parents, teachers, lecturers, colleagues, shopkeepers, children, and others. Katchen

(1996) suggests that classroom techniques can be used for teaching students how to present a spontaneous (impromptu) speech in a second language, such as for use at a job interview or cocktail party. First, such a classroom activity can be slightly graded to help lower students' level of fear. Then strategies for approaching impromptu speech development can be taught such as arriving at a topic (through student suggestions or brainstorming, speech contests or teacher's selection), finding a thesis statement or main idea, and developing the idea.

The impromptu speeches that will be investigated here are the assessed 3-minute speeches done in the classroom for the TCEE 1371- Spoken English for Professionals course offered at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya.

Some Past Studies on Impromptu Speeches

Not many studies have been carried out on how to assess Impromptu Speeches and what strategies are needed to make good Impromptu Speeches. Some past studies are discussed here.

Hsieh (2006) did a study entitled, "Problems in preparing for the English Impromptu Speech Contest: The Case of Yuanpei Institute of Science and Technology in Taiwan" and he wrote that entering an "English Impromptu Speech Contest" intimidates many students who do not have a good command of the English language. Some choose to give up before the contest date while others stand speechless on the stage. His paper identifies a range of problems confronted by them which can be categorized into three aspects: (1) language, (2) speaking skills and (3) background knowledge. Language poses many difficulties; many students have a narrow knowledge of English vocabulary, others have a limited understanding of correct word usage, and some make frequent mistakes with their grammar usage. As for speaking skills, students lack public speaking organizational skills and the ability to develop key points, and they have difficulty in controlling the subtle yet important timing of a speech and difficulty with attention-grabbing opening statements. The third problem is the contestants' limited background knowledge. Many students simply do not have the life experiences necessary to converse on a given topic.

Katchen (1996) in her study, "From Contests to Cocktail Parties: Strategies for Impromptu Speaking" suggests that classroom techniques be offered to teach students how to present a spontaneous (impromptu) speech in a second language, such as for use at a job interview or cocktail party. It is first suggested that such classroom activities be graded minimally to help lower students' level of apprehension. Then strategies for approaching impromptu speech development are discussed, including arriving at a topic (through student suggestions or brainstorming, speech contests or teacher's selection), finding a thesis statement or main idea, and developing the idea.

Some topics call for narration, some for description, and some for argumentation. Recommendations for tailoring the topic to the students are offered. Classroom preparation time and techniques are discussed. A section is devoted to preparing students for the specific demands of speech contests.

Lehtonen (1982) in his study, “Non-Verbal Aspects of Impromptu Speech” suggested that nonverbal phenomena associated with communication can take a variety of forms: kinesic behaviour, physical characteristics, touching behaviour, paralanguage, proxemics, artifacts, or environmental factors. To be regarded as communication, nonverbal behaviour should be intentional and goal-directed, but it need not involve a conscious choice by the speaker. Recently, many scholars have emphasized both the importance of nonverbal behaviour in the communicative event and the complexity of communicative signals, both verbal and nonverbal. Nonverbal signals are multifunctional, augment verbal signals in unique ways, and are intricately combined with verbal signals in communication. In impromptu speech, both verbal and nonverbal choices made by the speaker are spontaneous, not planned as they might be, to some extent, in non-impromptu speech. In general, the importance of the nonverbal channel depends on the function of the discourse, which also determines the communication style. More informative discourse depends more on the linguistic code, while emphasis on the social and expressive function of the communication means greater dependence on the nonverbal.

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to investigate the fears students face while delivering an impromptu speech, their opinions on the current assessment method and what strategies they and teachers think should be used to improve students’ presentation of impromptu speeches. The teachers/lecturers teaching this course were interviewed to find out the strengths and weaknesses of students in presenting their impromptu speeches and what strategies they suggest for students to improve their presentation of impromptu speeches.

Research Questions

- 1 The research questions for this study are as follows:
- 2 What are the fears faced by undergraduates in delivering an impromptu speech?
- 3 What are the views of undergraduates and lecturers with regard to the present way of assessing impromptu speeches?
- 4 What are the strengths and weaknesses of undergraduates when presenting their impromptu speeches?
- 5 What strategies can the lecturers take to improve the presentation of impromptu speeches by undergraduates?

Research Methodology

For this study a questionnaire (see Appendix 1), an interview with students (see Appendix 2) and an interview with lecturers (see Appendix 3) teaching this course were used. The questionnaire comprised open-ended and close-ended questions. There were only three questions in the questionnaire given to the undergraduates which were:

- 1 What are your fears when delivering Impromptu Speeches?
- 2 Have you benefitted from the present evaluation system for impromptu speeches Yes or No? If yes, why? and if no, why?
- 3 What strategies do you suggest teachers can use to improve the presentation of Impromptu Speeches by undergraduates?

The interview questions for the teachers included the number of years they have taught the TCEE 1371 – *Spoken English for Professionals* course, their opinion of the present evaluation system for impromptu speeches, their evaluation of their students' impromptu speeches, and the strategies they recommend to improve their students' presentation of impromptu speeches.

The interview questions for the ten undergraduates required them to narrate their experiences while delivering their impromptu speeches in class and how they hope to improve their delivery of their impromptu speeches given another chance.

The completed questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively (simple frequency counts, for example how many said "Yes" to having benefitted from the present evaluation system and how many said "No") and also qualitatively to answer the research questions. The interviews were analyzed qualitatively (reported in the form of direct quotations of their opinions or a paraphrase of their views) in answer to the research questions.

The researcher distributed a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) to all the students taking the TCEE 1371 course for this year, but only managed to get responses from 100 students who became the respondents for this study. The analysis involving a simple frequency count was done manually on a piece of paper after going through each of the questionnaires to get answers for the research questions.

Ten students, that is 10% of the sample, chosen at random, who were interviewed were asked to relate their experiences while delivering the impromptu speeches. No recording was done as renovation work was being carried out at the faculty and the drilling noise made it impossible to do any recording. The researcher made notes of their responses and these were used to answer the research questions.

For the eight teachers, the interview questions were asked and the researcher took notes but no recording was done during the interviews. This was also because construction work was being carried out at the faculty and the noise made any recording impossible. The questions were asked and the teachers were told that notes would be taken and they were to speak slowly and clearly. As they spoke, the researcher took notes. From the responses made, the researcher was able to obtain information to answer the research questions.

Assessment Method for Impromptu Speeches

The present assessment for Impromptu Speeches for TCEE1371 is as follows:

A student is called to the front of the class. He/She is allowed to choose one topic from a box. If the student does not understand the topic, he/she is only given one more chance to pick a different topic. After the second chance, the student must speak on that topic and no further draws are allowed. Upon getting the topic, the student is given one minute to prepare mentally (thinking on your feet) on the topic and he/she is timed. After the one minute is over, the student has to speak for three minutes on the topic and he/she is also timed and told to stop once the time limit is up.

One semester comprises fourteen weeks. The assessments for the impromptu speeches are done twice a semester that is in week seven and in week twelve. Students are given 10% for the first assessment and another 10% for the second assessment, making it a total of 20%. In other words, teachers/lecturers feel that “thinking on your feet” and speaking out are important in the real world and impromptu speeches are needed to function well in society.

Students are assessed under three headings namely Delivery, Content and Language. For evaluation the students are marked upon a total of 50 marks and then the marks are brought down to 10% of the course grade. Teachers just circle the marks obtained for each section under Delivery, Content and Language. The evaluation form used is shown in Table One on the next page.

Under DELIVERY the following items are assessed:

Volume of Voice

Can the student’s voice be heard by the whole audience?

Rate of Speech

Rate of speech means that the student is able to go at a pace whereby the audience can follow his or her line of thought. The student should not go too fast or too slow but at just the right pace so that the audience understands what he/she is trying to convey.

Body Language

Body language includes posture, eye contact, movement, facial expressions and gestures.

Intelligibility

Intelligibility refers to a student’s pronunciation and the words he or she uses in his or her speech. He or she must speak in simple language so that the audience will be able to understand him or her.

Table 1: Impromptu Speech Evaluation Form

Name:		Matriculation No.:				
Topic:						
Date/Time:						
DELIVERY	RATING					COMMENTS
Volume of Voice	0	1	2	3	4	5
Rate of Speech	0	1	2	3	4	5
Body Language	0	1	2	3	4	5
Intelligibility	0	1	2	3	4	5
CONTENT						
Attention-Getting Opener	0	1	2	3	4	5
Organization	0	1	2	3	4	5
Supporting Ideas	0	1	2	3	4	5
Graceful Conclusion	0	1	2	3	4	5
LANGUAGE (both Lexis & Structure)						
Range of words used	0	1	2	3	4	5
Accuracy	0	1	2	3	4	5

Total Marks = ?/50 X 10% = -----

Rating Key

0 = Very Poor 1= Poor 2= Unsatisfactory
 3=Acceptable 4= Good 5= Excellent

Under CONTENT, the following items are assessed:

Attention-Getting Opener

A student must be able to start his/her speech with an attention-getting opener and a preview of the content of the speech to lure the audience to listen to his/her speech.

Based on the topic given, a student can use a quotation, statistics, an anecdote, ask a question, use a startling fact etc. as a “hook” to catch the audience’s attention to what he/she has to say so that the audience remains interested for the rest of his or her speech.

Organization

The speech must have a preview, two or three main ideas and a good conclusion which are all cemented together with appropriate transition signals (showing addition, contrast, reason, effect etc.).

Supporting Ideas

Each main point in the speech must be supported with supporting ideas.

Graceful Conclusion

A good conclusion should give a summary of the main points where the purpose of the speech is briefly reviewed and the main ideas are repeated or restated. The speech can be ended with some memorable concluding remarks after the summary so that the audience will leave thinking about what has been said or delivered.

Under LANGUAGE, the following items are assessed:

Language includes both lexis (words) and structure.

Range of Words Used

In the context of the impromptu speech, range refers to the ability of a student to use many different words from the beginning to the end of his or her speech to express his or her thoughts based on the impromptu speech title.

Accuracy

Based on the context of the topic given the words chosen must be relevant and appropriate to the message. Accuracy also refers to the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the fears faced by undergraduates in delivering an impromptu speech?

The students’ fears are as follows:

- a Being Nervous and Afraid

The main fear of the students was that they were nervous. The reasons given for being nervous were:

- i 50%(n=50) of the undergraduates wrote that they lacked ideas/information/knowledge about the topic on which they were asked to speak for three minutes. They felt that given only one minute to prepare was too short.
 - ii The teachers refused to allow them to write down their ideas and they had to prepare mentally and because of this they were afraid that they might lose their ideas while presenting the impromptu speech.
 - iii 30% (n=30) of the students were afraid to face the audience – standing in front of the class and facing the whole class.
 - iv 10% (n=10) were afraid that their minds would go blank when facing the audience and they feared they might lose the ideas they had thought of at the beginning. They felt that the three minutes were like three hours to them. When all the ideas they had thought of had been presented, they started to mumble to themselves because they had nothing else to say.
 - v They could not recall the correct words due to a lack of vocabulary. The audience might not understand what they are saying and this made them become nervous as they felt that they could not express themselves well.
 - vi 20% (n=20) had test phobia. They knew they were being assessed and this made them become tense and anxious and they became more conscious of their presentations and thus were not natural.
- a Not Being Confident
- 60% (N= 60) of the students lacked confidence because:
- i their English Language is not good; their grammar is poor and maybe their pronunciation also may not be too good
 - ii they were just shy to face the audience even though they were all undergraduates coming from different faculties
 - iii there was a sense of being panicky for no reason as they said they felt cold, with their hands and feet becoming frozen or numb
 - iv they felt that their points were not enough to stretch for the three minutes
 - v 20% (n= 20) were afraid that the audience might not understand what they are saying
 - vi 10% (n=10) suffered the “tip of the tongue” phenomenon, that is, they just could not come up with the precise word/words required for their presentation – their minds just went blank and they had to pause for the word which had just been suddenly erased from their mind
 - vii 5% (n=5) were afraid that the topic that they would be given would be sensitive such as on race, religion, politics and this may give them stage fright because they are not used to expressing themselves well on technical or sensitive matters

- viii another reason given is that they have the main points but find it difficult to elaborate on the ideas well by giving appropriate examples
- ix they were scared that their speech is not well organized and they lack the fluency in the language to speak smoothly which made them lose confidence of themselves
- x they felt that they could not speak critically and creatively on the topic given as they lacked knowledge and fluency in the English language
- xi they felt that they suffered from stress from having to speak in front of an audience as they did not have enough time to prepare for the talk. In the time given to prepare – only one minute they were unable to think of the best ideas.
- xii those who were weak in English had to translate their ideas from Malay to English and thus they were nervous because they faced a lack of vocabulary, lack of ideas, had to present in front of an audience and were unable to express themselves well.
- xiii they felt that getting a good attention-getter was a problem to them and thus they felt that they were unable to catch the attention of the audience

Some excerpts from the interviews which show that most students are nervous are as follows:

Student 1 who was interviewed said, “It seems like nothing came out from my mind when I got my topic. While giving the speech, I was really nervous. Seems like lack of vocabulary, grammatical errors were all around, and I had to elaborate those points effectively”.

Student 3 said, “Personally, I couldn’t think of anything at first because I was really nervous. I was blank, in the beginning but managed to sort myself out”.

Student 5 said, “During the impromptu speech, I felt very nervous. I was also afraid because I did not know what topic I would get.”

Research Question 2: What are the views of undergraduates and lecturers with regard to the present way of assessing impromptu speeches?

Our present TCEE 1371 procedure in testing Impromptu Speeches follows the following format:

- a students are asked to choose one topic from two taken out of a box/envelope
- b once the topic is chosen, the student has one minute to prepare
- c then the student has to speak on it for three minutes

Seventy-two undergraduates replied to the questionnaire stating that this method is an effective way to test Impromptu Speeches and they are agreeable to it as it benefits them. However, twenty-eight students wrote that this is not a very effective method and they have some grievances against this method and their reasons are as follows:

- a They feel that one minute is too short a time given to them to prepare for an impromptu speech. They feel that if they are not familiar with the topic, they cannot perform well and are penalized or get a low grade. Their solution to this is that they should be given at least three to five minutes. Ten students wanted at least two minutes, another ten students wanted between two to three minutes, and the remainder eight students wanted 30 seconds more at one minute and thirty seconds.
- b The reasons they give for asking for an extension in the time period is that the topic is not familiar to them and they need extra time to think. Some (ten students) suggested that they be given the free hand to talk on and choose a topic of their own. They are of the opinion that since the teachers wants to test their ability to communicate effectively and efficiently, therefore more time should be given to them to prepare thoroughly. This is in order to lower their stress and pressure to speak in a 'tensed up' environment where they are being assessed. This would allow them to think and speak up as they are required to do for an impromptu speech. This will test their capability in speaking.
- c They believe that some teachers are strict and do not give them the freedom to choose another topic from the box, and they are forced to speak on the first topic that they pull out from the box. They feel that this is unfair; therefore, they suggest that all of them should be given at least two topics to choose from the box. Ten students even suggested that they be given a choice of three to choose from. This is because they feel that they are still young and inexperienced and they lack knowledge in certain topics.
- d Eight students suggested that all be given the same topic so that they can show their potential. They feel that some students get an easy topic and score highly while some get a very difficult topic and get a low grade. One must understand that it is difficult to construct a speech in only one minute and what is more, to organize it. This is the reason they feel that they get very nervous – only one minute to come up with a speech! They believe that nothing comes to their minds in such a short time as ideas flow in only slowly in their minds.
- e Twenty students felt that they should be given more time to present instead of the present three minutes. They feel that once they start talking during the three minutes, they realize that more ideas are being generated in their minds and they feel that they can be given more time for the speech, for example about five minutes instead of the present three minutes.

- f The students felt that they should be given more practice in class for their impromptu speeches before the real test. Presently, not much practice is given in class. They feel that they should be made confident to speak in front of their friends more often in class.

Some of the TCEE 1301 staff members had this to say of the present evaluation system:

Staff 1

“Yes (this is an effective way to test impromptu speeches) because this is what impromptu speeches are all about. We cannot give them more time than this. One minute is enough to prepare. Think on your feet. Start to think of points – this is what impromptu speech is about.”

Staff 2

“Yes, because it is impromptu, test students. On the purpose to meet objective that is it is impromptu.”

Staff 3

“Yes, it is alright because it is impromptu speech – must speak or give speech in a short period of time. We do it every day - time limit is okay and they can perform.”

Staff 4

“I was not informed by the coordinator that my students could choose one topic from two which they pick out from an envelope. Thus for my group there was no choosing of a topic. They just had to speak on the first title that they pulled out from the box. I gave them one minute to write down their points and they were timed. Yes, I agree that the format is right for testing impromptu speeches. They should be given very little time to prepare. It’s actually thinking on your feet. Our testing does allow for this practice. They have to organize and draw on whatever resources, organize and speak.”

Research Question 3: *What are the strengths and weaknesses of students when presenting their impromptu speeches?*

Eight lecturers teaching the TCEE 1371 – the *Spoken English for Professionals* course were interviewed. Some of their answers regarding the strengths and mistakes or weaknesses of their students when presenting their impromptu speeches were as follows:

Staff 1

She has been teaching this course for the past two semesters.

According to her the strengths of the good students are, “Their strong points – for

the good students, they brainstorm quickly, think of very strong points and manage to develop the ideas and organize into certain patterns, e.g. for sports they can talk about the past, present and future of sports or the benefits of sports to students, adults, and children. They have a good introduction – a good-attention getting opener and a good concluding remark. Overall, speech must be well organized”.

The weaknesses are, “The mistakes the students make are their points that they want to deliver are not strong. They don’t have ideas – sometimes they remain silent, and sometimes they talk on points without elaboration. Language problem is like not being able to express themselves well in English. They are not able to find the right word to say. They make a lot of mistakes in their sentence structures. For the weaker students, they finish faster that is within two minutes. Good students can speak up to three minutes or more if not stopped. They are timed and are given half a minute to conclude. Pronunciation for the weaker students is a problem. Regarding time adherence, weaker students tend to finish faster, say thank you and finish – this results in lower marks for them. Their conclusion is only one sentence, and they have no organization. For gestures – generally all have hand movements, but no movement by walking. Facial expressions – good students are comfortable while speaking, and they are more confident. I can tell from their faces. Weaker students are more tensed, and conscious of themselves. Eye contact – all try to establish eye contact. They refer to notes but always look up. I allow them to write short notes for their one minute preparation. Those who do not read sound more natural. The weaker students who tend to read sound artificial. Accent is strong especially for the Chinese and Malay students, and they find problems in pronouncing certain words. The “r” sound is pronounced as “l” - “not obvious” but accent is very strong. Malays – they use Malay accent when speaking in English. Depends on where they come from – those coming from Kuala Lumpur are okay but not those from Perak, Kelantan, and Kedah – their Malay dialectal accent in English is very strong.”

Staff 2

Ms. Chic was one of the designers of this course and has been teaching it since 2000. Presently, she is teaching two groups of around 15 students each. According to her, there are very few good students who have good grammar, good organization and a good organizational structure in their speeches. However, she only got one good student from the law faculty, whose language was structured, and pronunciation was okay. To her, “Law students generally have good oracy skills.” Their weaknesses according to her “are the students face a language proficiency problem – language is a real problem, and also pronunciation. They really have to prepare. They have difficulty in speaking English. Just like asking you to speak in a language you are not proficient in, you will not perform well as you do not have a good vocabulary, you’ll have a limited vocabulary, so how to talk well.”

In her groups over the past years, she has only got a few good speakers. Generally, she feels that the students from the Science, Arts, Law, Business and Built Environment are weak. Regarding mistakes they make – if asked to talk about “What do you think of the political position of the country?” The topic is too broad but they have to narrow it down and they don’t know how to narrow it. Language for some is quite good. Malay students’ accent is okay but the Chinese have an accent. Even pronunciation and vocabulary is a problem.”

Regarding time, she feels all her students can speak up to three minutes. She said, “From what I see, all have anxiety and are nervous, they stutter, are stiff, have no eye contact, just look at the ceiling, are very rigid, have no movement and some have while some don’t have facial expressions.”

For evaluation, she gives her students full 10 marks for the first evaluation or maiden speech, just for trying. She feels that this is their maiden experience in impromptu speeches, thus she does not mark them down. She goes through their weaknesses for the first impromptu speech and marks them down for the second evaluation if they do not perform well.

Staff 3

She has been teaching this TCEE 1371 course for the past five years. Presently, she is teaching only one group comprising 19 students.

The strengths of her students according to her are, “For good speakers, language is there, they have ideas and know what to talk about. They know how to organize their speech all within three minutes – they are confident. The good students make occasional grammar errors.”

Their weaknesses according to her are, “For mistakes, when asked a question requesting to give one problem of some issue, they give more than one problem. Thus they do not answer the question accurately. Language is also a problem. There is no organization of their impromptu speeches, they have poor vocabulary. The weak students lack ideas and so they cannot speak for three minutes. They speak less, say thank you and leave and thus obtain less marks. Other aspects - they are timed, they have very little gestures, nothing much of facial expressions. They keep smiling all the time. There is not much leg movement. For the weaker students their basic pronunciation is not good. The Chinese students tend to have Chinese accents. The weak students have all kinds of problems for example they tend to use the plural form in all their words, and also have lots of grammar errors in their speech.”

Research Question 4: *What strategies can lecturers use to improve the presentation of impromptu speeches by undergraduates?*

When the ten students who were interviewed were asked what they would like to improve on given another chance to perform their impromptu speeches again, they realized their mistakes for the first impromptu speech and gave the following answers:

Student 1: “Read more to gain more information. Improve communication skills to speak fluently.”

Student 2: “If I were given another chance to redo the impromptu speech again, I would firstly give some more supportive and convincing points. Besides, I would remember to smile while giving the speech, and also pay more attention to eye contact. This could gain more attention from the audience. Also, be more natural.”

Student 3: “For my second impromptu speech I thought I could communicate more with the viewers to lessen my nerves.”

Discussion of Results

From the results we see that 28 students want more preparation time for their impromptu speeches as compared with the present time of one minute only. The researcher feels that where time is concerned, it is right that we only give our undergraduates one minute preparation time because this is what impromptu speeches are – talking on a topic given without advance preparation. As this is their first speech, we give them a grace period of one minute preparation time. By right, in the true sense of impromptu speech no time at all should be given and they should speak on the spur of the moment. From the answers given, we see that some of these students do not know the real meaning of the word “impromptu.”

Eight students suggested that all the students be given the same topic so that they can show their potential. They feel that some students get an easy topic and score highly while some get a very difficult topic and get a low grade. The researcher believes that only one topic cannot be given to the undergraduates because the first few students would be the “scapegoats” because their ideas would be used by those who come after them and thus it would not be a fair assessment. What can be done is the genre of the topic should be maintained, for example, all can be persuasive, narrative, didactic, expository, descriptive etc. and as such will be fair to all the students.

From the excerpts of the teachers teaching the course, we see that the students have difficulty with their English language, organization skills, speaking skills, pronunciation, body language, and background knowledge of current issues and

these issues were also raised by the authors of past studies on impromptu speeches mentioned above. In other words, the students lack confidence because they are not well prepared to face these issues. The researcher is an experienced teacher teaching this course and she too agrees that students do have problems with all these issues which need to be addressed by all teachers teaching this course. The researcher's present study supports the findings of Hsieh, Shu-min (2006) as a large number of University of Malaya undergraduate students too have problems in language, speaking skills and limited background knowledge of current issues.

Lehtonen (1982) in his study, "Non-Verbal Aspects of Impromptu Speech" emphasizes the use of body language to enhance the performance of one's impromptu speech. In this study too, the researcher has emphasized that under the assessment of Delivery, body language or non-verbal language be assessed. In other words, students are encouraged to make their impromptu speeches more interesting by using facial expressions and gestures which are relevant to their speech. The results show that teachers presently find some of the speeches 'flat' because there is no body language which can carry the "wow" or "oomph" factor to the speech and make it more attractive to the audience.

The present researcher agrees with Katchen (1996) that students be taught how to go about making impromptu speeches and she has given recommendations on these for teachers to use. The present research shows that students lack practice in the classroom and teachers are urged to increase practice in class before the students are assessed.

Recommendations

Based on the feedback given by the 100 student respondents via a questionnaire, nine staff via an interview and 10 students via an interview, the following strategies can be used by students and teachers to improve their presentation of impromptu speeches. The recommended strategies are as follows:

1. Use videos to show some examples of effective speakers such as Larry King, Oprah Winfrey etc.
2. Students should be encouraged to read newspapers, magazines, books, brochures, articles on the internet by surfing the internet etc. to enhance their general knowledge of local and foreign news.
3. Encourage students to breathe in deeply before starting a speech and other light stretching exercises to relax their muscles.
4. Students have to learn to be confident by thinking positively and by having a positive attitude.
5. "Practice Makes Perfect" is the saying that they must always remember.

6. Encourage them to listen to the news over the radio and television. Just by listening to shows such as “Hello on 2”, “Larry King Live”, “Oprah Winfrey” etc. they will get to know how local and foreign issues are discussed and this will increase their general knowledge and will make them better prepared for their impromptu speeches. They should also watch more English Language movies and listen to the lyrics of English songs to improve their own English Language.
7. In class, teachers should give more practice to all the students to speak up in front of the class.
8. Teachers should practice teaching by using a slightly more casual style. In this way, students will feel less stressed and be under less pressure if their teacher opens up to them. In other words to lessen the gap between teachers and students, teachers have to be more casual and learn to be approachable. When students are in a less tense environment and get to treating their teachers as their friends, they will learn to open up their minds and learn to speak more confidently. They suddenly become more comfortable with the surroundings and do not see their teachers as a threat to their opinions.
9. Teachers should teach their students how to organize a good impromptu speech by having an interesting attention-getting opener, have two main points which are well elaborated via anecdotes or examples, and a good conclusion by summarizing the main points and giving their own final memorable thoughts on the topic given. Students must be taught how to use appropriate transition signals to cement all their ideas together to ensure unity and fluency of thought and expression in their impromptu speeches. By teaching them all these skills, students can come up with more structured speeches which will make it easy for the audience to follow..
10. To make the delivery more interesting, students must be taught to have good eye contact with the audience. Besides eye contact, they should learn to have good facial expressions that are well aligned to the emotions portrayed in their speech. Instead of staying frozen in one spot, they should be encouraged to move sideways one step at a time or to move a step forwards and backwards. Instead of putting their hands at their sides or inside their pockets they should be asked to use hand and arm gestures to express themselves. By using body language, students can enhance their delivery of their impromptu speeches as well as make their speeches more interesting.
11. The students have to get involved in activities inside the campus such as societies, associations, and games so that they get to converse with other students from other states, cultures, socio-economic backgrounds and religions. By getting involved in co-curricular activities, students learn to express themselves better and learn more about their country and people living in it.
12. They have to read up on idiomatic expressions, proverbs, sayings etc. They

should know how to use metaphors and similes well. Presently some students lack the command of idiomatic language. If they do more reading, their speeches can be spiced up with these terms and this will make them become more fluent speakers of the English Language.

13. For pronunciation, students can be told to refer to online dictionaries which can teach them how to pronounce words.
14. Students should be told to ask their friends to monitor their speech. Ask them to note down how many times they say “okay” and “lah”. They have to learn to stop using these slang words in their speech.
15. Students must be taught the different organizing patterns for speeches which they can apply to their impromptu speech. Mental processing will be easier if the ideas follow the patterns put forward by Dale and Wolf (2006, p. 212). These organizational patterns include the following:
 - a Past-Present-Future: to describe how something was, how it has now changed and how it will be in the future
 - b Time: to describe chronological events or processes in sequential order
 - c Problem-Solution: to describe a problem and methods to solve it
 - d Location: to divide a topic into different geographical settings
 - e Cause-Effect: to describe a situation and its effects
 - f Effect-Cause: to describe a situation and its causes
 - g Related Subtopics: to divide a topic into different parts
 - h Advantage-Disadvantage: to describe positive and negative aspects of a topic
16. Students can also brush up their grammar by going online or referring to grammar books from the library.
17. Teachers should give feedback to their students after their first performance so that they do not repeat the same mistakes in their next impromptu speech
18. Students have to be told to overcome their shyness and become more confident in the real, working world. Impromptu speeches are made in our daily life and if someone were to ask us to speak in front of an audience, one should take it up as a challenge and speak naturally and accurately to them.
19. Articulation of words is important so that the audience understands us. This needs practice.
20. Socialize and talk to those around you in the real world and you will slowly become a good impromptu speaker.

Conclusion and Implications

This research paper looked into the fears faced by undergraduates when performing impromptu speeches, the opinions of the undergraduates and lecturers on the current assessment of impromptu speeches for the TCEE 1371 – *Spoken English for*

Professionals course. It also touched on the evaluation given by the lecturers and the strengths and weaknesses of the undergraduates when presenting their impromptu speeches. The opinions of lecturers and students on the current assessment method for impromptu speeches were also investigated.

Sixty out of one hundred students concerned were nervous and not confident and not being confident. This study supports the findings of the study by Hsieh, Shu-min (2006) as a large number of University of Malaya undergraduate students too have problems in language, speaking skills and limited background knowledge of current issues.

The researcher discovered that presently the assessment for the impromptu speeches was not uniform for all the groups. The differences were pointed out (like the method for preparation, the scoring, and the topics) and the researcher will meet with the coordinator of the course to overcome these differences and make the assessment uniform for the coming session. Finally, twenty recommendations have been put forward so that the students can improve their presentation of impromptu speeches. The present researcher agrees with Katchen (1996) that students should be taught in the classroom how to go about making impromptu speeches so that they are better prepared for the Impromptu Test when the time comes. This study supports Lehtonen's (1982) study, "Non-Verbal Aspects of Impromptu Speech" as the researcher believes that students should be told to emphasize body language while making their impromptu speeches as this adds flavour or excitement to their talk.

Impromptu speeches are important in our daily life and it is with impromptu speeches that communication is kept alive and problems are solved. We must learn to express ourselves well so that our world can be a better place to live in for all of us. Lecturers must give enough classroom practice on Impromptu Speeches to their students so that they become more confident, and know the necessary strategies to employ to become more effective impromptu speakers. Weak students must be informed and guided to improve their English language proficiency so that they will be more coherent in their speeches. This study can be used as a guide for further research on Impromptu Speeches in other institutions in Malaysia and outside of Malaysia.

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APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE ON IMPROMPTU SPEECHES

Please answer the following questions honestly. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

- 1 What are your fears about giving an Impromptu Speech. Please list them.

- 2 Our TCEE 1371 procedure in testing Impromptu Speech is as follows:
a Choose one topic from one/two taken out of box/envelope
b Once you have chosen a topic, you are given one minute to prepare mentally.
c Then you have to speak on it for three minutes
Have you benefitted by this method of testing?

Please tick next to your chosen answer.

Yes _____

No _____

If you said no, can you suggest a better way to test Impromptu Speeches.

- 4 What strategies do you suggest teachers can use to improve the presentation of Impromptu Speeches by undergraduates?

THE END.
THANK YOU.

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON IMPROMPTU SPEECH PERFORMANCE FOR STUDENTS TAKING THE TCEE 1371 COURSE

Note: These interview questions are meant for a research on Impromptu Speeches. Please do inform me if you wish to remain anonymous. Thanks for your cooperation

- 1 Please share your experience with me while performing your 3- minute mpromptu speech.
- 2 Given another chance to perform the same impromptu speech again, what changes will you make to ensure that it is better the second time round.

Thank you for volunteering.

APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS/LECTURERS TEACHING THE TCEE 1371 – SPOKEN ENGLISH FOR PROFESSIONALS

- 1 For how many years have you been teaching the TCEE 1371 – *Spoken English for Professionals* course?
- 2 What is your opinion of the present evaluation system for Impromptu Speeches?
- 3 What are your comments on the evaluation of your students' impromptu speeches?
- 4 What are the strategies that you recommend to improve your students' presentation of impromptu speeches?