

THE IMPACT OF PEER OBSERVATION AND FEEDBACK ON TECHNICAL SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS: A CONSTRUCTIVE MODEL

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ABSTRACT

The present paper attempts to showcase the need and importance of peer observation and feedback in developing technical seminar presentation skills of the students at tertiary level. The paper endeavors to know whether a structured format will help students to know what they have to observe in the seminar presentations to give constructive feedback. Further, the study examines whether peer feedback ensures more involvement of target group in teaching/learning process or not.

Keywords: Technical Seminar, Presentation Skills, Peer Observation, Peer Feedback, Constructive Format.

INTRODUCTION

Technical seminar presentations are part of the syllabus of Engineering academic courses. Throughout the semesters students will be asked to give presentation by selecting topics from their core subjects comprising Technical Terminology/Vocabulary. The term technical seminar presentations are used as specific Presentation and they don't come under general category. At the end of every semester, students need to give seminars and on the completion of their entire course, they need to give presentation on their respective projects. Thus, evaluation of presentations is part of Engineering course curricula. Hence, enhancing students' presentation skills holds vital significance.

Technical seminar presentation skills are set of techniques and are very essential for presenting oral information successfully before the audience. These skills are highly required for students as they ought to give seminar presentations in their course of study and giving Technical seminar presentation, help them to participate in Group Discussion which is one of the parameter that the recruiters of the hiring companies approach. After entering in to professions also, students need to address several gatherings which are of utmost importance to retain and get promotions in their careers. In the light of these facts, it is assumed that if students are given practice in

observing and providing feedback on their peer performance, it would help them to enhance their technical seminar presentations. "The Peer Observation Project encourages a positive relationship between the observer and observed peer. The peer will have a shared experience and more importantly have different perspectives". (Martin, G. A, 1998: 161-170).

Peer observation is the observation of teachers by teachers, usually, though not always, on a reciprocal basis and it gives teachers an opportunity to learn from each other in a non-threatening environment. (<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/peer-observation> p.1). Peer observation would be beneficial even for the students. Significance of providing feedback by observing technical seminar presentations is of a particular importance. If students hail from different parts of country and from other countries peer observation would help them immensely. "The Peer Observation Project gives international students the opportunity to add to their presentation skills by watching a peer for non-verbal cues (eye contact, body language, and gestures), verbal signals, use of diagrams and specific examples. (Sarkisian, E, 2006: MA, chapters 4, 6).

1. Review of Literature

Research so far done on the role of feedback in teaching/learning process established, that it has major influence in respective Educational settings. John Hattie

and Helen Timperley provided an excellent summary in their claim that, "Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement, but this impact can be either positive or negative. This evidence shows that although feedback is among the major influences, the type of feedback and the way it is given can be differentially effective". (John Hattie and Helen Timperley, 2007 77: 81). Feedback is hypothesized as data given by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) concerning aspects of one's performance. A teacher or parent can provide correct information, a peer can provide an alternative strategy, a book can provide information to clarify ideas, a parent can provide encouragement, and a learner can look up the answer to evaluate the correctness of a response. Feedback thus is a "consequence" of performance. (Hattie & Timperley, 2001: 82).

Feedback provides learners an opportunity to correct themselves accordingly. Winne and Butler states that, "feedback is information with which a learner can confirm, add to, overwrite, tune, or restructure information in memory." (Winne, Butler, 1994:5740). It is widely well-known that feedback is a significant part of the learning process in the area of education. "A wealth of evidence exists that peer learning and teaching is effective for goals, content and students of different skills and personalities" (in Johnson, D.M. et al as cited in McKeachie & Svinicki, 2006:214-215). The literature also suggests that the feedback process is most valuable when the teachers and the students are actively involved in the process. According to Hattie and Timperley feedback must address the following three questions:

- Where am I going? (What are the goals?)
- How am I going? (What progress is being made towards the goal?)
- Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress?)

(Hattie & Timperley, 2007:86)

Significance of feedback in teaching public speaking is of a particular importance. Feedback can come from teachers, peers, the self or relevant professionals outside the teaching-learning relationship. Active learning requires

not only prompt but also specific, challenging feedback. Without feedback the learner is most likely to recycle past achievements and errors rather than obtaining/developing new insight, ability and competence. Along with constructive feedback by the teacher, it is wise to allow students to use self-assessment and peer-assessment techniques to evaluate their performance by commenting on their gains and lacks. "The incorporation of peer feedback helps students become better at identifying the qualities of each other's good work and diagnosing their own problems". (Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., DiPietro, M., Lovett, M. C., Norman, M. K, 2010: 151)

C. McNamara generalized the guidelines for giving feedback. According to him the Effective feedback

- 1) implies clarity,
- 2) emphasizes the positive features,
- 3) specific,
- 4) focuses on behavior rather than the person,
- 5) descriptive rather than evaluative,
- 6) careful with advice.

Teacher has to be careful while giving his/her feedback. This will have its impact on students' feelings of fear or anxiety. (McNamara, 2005:5) Hence, rash remarks, critical comments of the teacher may discourage students and affect their further willingness to make a contribution negatively. Hence, teacher's feedback should be positive; appreciating them for participation and encouraging them for better performance next time. Sometimes teacher can delay her/his feedback and ask the presenters themselves to assess their speech. It might be either self-feedback or peer-feedback. This kind of feedback though it consumes more time but facilitates learning over time and helps students to develop alternative memory modes to the information and more attention can be obtained on the spur of the moment. And this feedback also enables students to make their own appraisal of their performance.

The feedback should be positive and it should not hurt students' feelings, otherwise the impact of it on learning accomplishment is low if it is focused on "praise, rewards and punishment". (Hattie & Timperley, 2007:84). Hattie and Timperley also note that feedback is more effective, when it

addresses achievable goals and when it does not carry "high threats to self-esteem" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007:86). The need of providing feedback preferably constructive feedback is well established by the research so far conducted on the role of feedback in teaching/learning domain.

2. Background

To find out the significant role of peer observation and feedback in enhancing technical seminar presentation skills of the students, an empirical study was conducted. For this study, peer observation and feedback was carried out in two spells from 3rd Year B.Tech students of CMR Engineering College, Hyderabad. The students were divided into 2 groups and one group had to give technical seminar while another group observed them.

2.1 Observation and Feedback- Spell - I

In the first spell, the peer group was just asked to observe the technical seminar given by their fellow students and give their feedback. A group of 10 students observed the presentations of 10 students and provided feedback. The first group consisting of 10 students gave presentation on their selected topics and second group observed the presentations and gave feedback.

The analysis of the first spell of peer observation and feedback presents both positive and negative feedback. Each participant was given 15 minutes time for presenting his/her topic. The peer observers group observed all the presentations and provided their feedback.

2.1.1 Positive Feedback

Good, average, very good, excellent/ well done, good effort, good command over language, everything fine, great and neat presentation

2.1.2 Negative Feedback

Not so good, below average, poor English, feeble voice, appealing/spelling errors, no movement in the hall, everything went wrong/ no confidence, no eye-contact at all, nervous

It is obvious from the above "feedback" that the observers focused on elements of personal interest. It can be considered as vague and it highlighted the negative aspects of the presenters. This feedback generated

confusion and chaos among the students and presentation ambiance became a tension prone instead of an encouraging one. It happened so as in the first spell, the peer group was unaware of what to observe and upon what to reflect because students were asked to observe the presentation of their peer and to give feedback without proper guidance such as what components they should focus while observing the class and express their views etc. The outcome of this observation was neither useful to observers nor presenters as most of the observers came out with negative comments on their counterparts' performance.

A structured format is generated to help peer observation group for providing feedback and let this group to aware of certain aspects of presentation skills to consider while giving technical seminars. In the second spell, each presenter was observed by a peer observer. Thus 10 presenters were observed by 10 peer observers.

2.2 Observation and Feedback- Spell - II

To assist peer observers to observe and provide constructive feedback on their fellow students, the following structured format is given for providing feedback. (Feedback formats are provided in the appendix)

Scope for Improvement = 1, Average = 2, Effective = 3,

Sl. No /Name	Parameters	Scope for Improvement	Average	Effective	Very effective
Karthik kumar	Presentation	1	2	3	4
	I. The Details of topic; Title, key words are prominently displayed either on board or on PPTs		2		
	II. Uses relevant vocabulary			3	
	III. Exhibits fluency of language		2		
	IV. Uses suitable tone of speech	1			
	V. Oral and written instructions are clear		2		
	VI. Slides/materials are appropriate, well-organized, resourceful and stimulating				3
VII. Body language; posture, eye contact, gestures			2		

Table 1. Feedback Provided to karthik kumar by Sai Teja

Very effective = 4

The feedback provided for Karthik kumar by his fellow student, Sai Teja is shown in Table 1.

3. Feedback Analysis

The feedback from the second spell of observation was discussed with all the participants of the study. To find out its impact on the students, their views were collected. All the students expressed that peer observation and feedback helped them to know how to give effective presentations and the format helped them to observe and identify the skills such as language proficiency/ competence, method /approach/technique used for presentation, interaction patterns, appropriate use of teaching aids and materials etc. Both the groups expressed that the activity on peer observation and feedback enabled them to enhance their presentation skills as they came to know what areas should be focused while giving technical seminars. It is recognized from the obtained data that students found it more comfortable giving their technical seminar presentations before their peer group than giving in front of their teachers as they maintained proper eye contact and were audacious in their performance. Some of them did not follow proper organization/sequence of presentation. Some of the students were not fluent and could not use technical vocabulary.

3.1 The Views of Students/Participants of the Study

The peer observer group expressed that the structured format enabled them to observe the class systematically to provide feedback. They have also mentioned that the format will help them to prepare in a systematic way for giving technical seminar presentations. The observed group expressed that the feedback provided by their peer in the first spell did not help them much. Based on the first spell feedback, they tried to improve their presentation. For instance, Karthik gave presentation on how to develop a web page in first spell. The peer observers comment that his presentation was average and he did not prepare well. So, Karthik tried to improve his presentation in second spell and was provided feedback. After receiving second spell feedback, he expressed that feedback given in the second spell by his peer group enabled him to know his pitfalls made while giving his presentation. (The detailed

feedback formats are given in the appendix).

Conclusion

Peer observation and feedback ensures more participation of students and they feel more interested and comfortable to present themselves as they get new stage where they are judged by their Peer Observation group and also feel more responsible and interested to give feedback. This study will help ESL teachers to know the weak points of students from students' perspective and get opportunity to train them accordingly. Getting feedback from different sources would help teachers to know the specific language training needs of the students. Thus, it helps in reducing the inconsistency between existing, understanding and expected aims of teaching.

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Appendix

Feedback provided to Keerthana by Masood

Sl. No /Name	Parameters	Scope for Improvement	Average	Effective	Very effective
	Presentation	1	2	3	4
	I. The Details of topic; Title, key words are prominently displayed either on board or on PPTs			3	
	II. Uses relevant vocabulary			3	
	III. Exhibits fluency of language			3	
	IV. Uses suitable tone of speech		2		
	V. Oral and written instructions are clear			3	
	VI. Slides/materials are appropriate, well-organized, resourceful and stimulating			3	
	VII. Body language; posture, eye contact, gestures			3	

Feedback provided to Harshini by Sandhy Tiwari

Sl. No /Name	Parameters	Scope for Improvement	Average	Effective	Very effective
	Presentation	1	2	3	4
	I. The Details of topic; Title, key words are prominently displayed either on board or on PPTs			3	
	II. Uses relevant vocabulary			3	
	III. Exhibits fluency of language			3	
	IV. Uses suitable tone of speech			2	
	V. Oral and written instructions are clear				4
	VI. Slides/materials are appropriate, well-organized, resourceful and stimulating			3	
	VII. Body language; posture, eye contact, gestures	1			

Feedback provided to Prashanth by Madhusudan Reddy

Sl. No /Name	Parameters	Scope for Improvement	Average	Effective	Very effective
Prashanth	Presentation	1	2	3	4
	I. The Details of topic; Title, key words are prominently displayed either on board or on PPTs		2		
	II. Uses relevant vocabulary		2		
	III. Exhibits fluency of language		2		
	IV. Uses suitable tone of speech	1			
	V. Oral and written instructions are clear	1			
	VI. Slides/materials are appropriate, well-organized, resourceful and stimulating		2		
	VII. Body language; posture, eye contact, gestures	1			

Feedback provided to Hafeez by Pratyusha

Sl. No /Name	Parameters	Scope for Improvement	Average	Effective	Very effective
	Presentation	1	2	3	4
	I. The Details of topic; Title, key words are prominently displayed either on board or on PPTs	1			
	II. Uses relevant vocabulary	1			
	III. Exhibits fluency of language		2		
	IV. Uses suitable tone of speech	1			
	V. Oral and written instructions are clear		2		
	VI. Slides/materials are appropriate, well-organized, resourceful and stimulating	1			
	VII. Body language; posture, eye contact, gestures		2		

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