


Exploring Strategies to Improve Oral Communication Engagement Online According to Higher Education Instructors

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses the following problem: the strategies higher education instructors need to strengthen the oral communication skills of online undergraduate students have not yet been identified. The exploratory design used semistructured interviews that queried the experiences of 10 undergraduate online higher education instructors tasked with teaching a course with an online public speaking assignment. The population in the study was geographically disbursed and worked remotely within the United States. The conceptual framework guided the study and focused on the general research problem and the ways in which management can improve practices related to teaching and learning. The theoretical construct that was most closely examined was andragogy. The research question asked: What are the strategies higher education instructors need to strengthen the oral communication skills of online undergraduate students? The results of the semistructured interviews uncovered five themes but this chapter examines the theme of student engagement.

KEYWORDS

Employability, Instructional Design, Online Curriculum Development, Online Higher Education Instructors, Public Speaking, Teaching Online Oral Communication

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on one major theme of a larger research study and draws on a project which explored educational theories on learning, oral communication and management in higher education. Ten higher education instructors with at least three years of experience teaching online took part from the United States. The study found that higher education instructors aimed to increase student engagement to help drive completion rates of oral reports (DiPeri, 2020). Kolb and Kolb (2005) examined how student success had more to do with the process of learning than achieving outcomes (Peterson, DeCato, & Kolb, 2015). Adults learn best in an experiential learning process and student engagement is the primary goal of instruction. To learn by doing, the student must engage in the activity. This article focuses on the topic of oral communication engagement in the online classroom because the study found that student engagement was the biggest factor in the success of learning oral communication online. Participants shared multiple strategies to increase student engagement including increasing student and instructor presence, modeling oral skill and stressing the importance of oral skill to students. Oral communication engagement has been linked to positive participation and learning (Frymier & Houser, 2016).

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The researchers project focused on online instructors that came from a diverse disciplinary background which further examines the need for oral skill practice across disciplines. Universities should assess the level of oral communication skills within a program in order to increase student proficiency and bring them to a level desired by employers (McBain et al., 2016). Ali (2017) found that skill in oral communication is vital for graduates to be successful industry professionals.

This article details the dissertation study that examined the curriculum strategies higher education instructors need to strengthen the oral communication skills of online undergraduate students (DiPeri, 2020). Outlined in this article is the components of increased oral communication engagement in the online classroom and the implication for learning through practice.

BACKGROUND

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in the study was the curriculum strategies higher education instructors need to strengthen the oral communication skills of online undergraduate students had not yet been identified. (Butz & Askim-Lovseth, 2015). McBain, et al., (2016) noted that in the future there is a need for research on how organizations should help instructors understand more about the opportunities online oral communication tasks offer. Also noted was how the work to develop oral communication tasks could bring the student appreciable gains. Online instructors do not have a set of strategies to follow that would indicate the teaching behavior needed to more effectively increase oral skill in online students. Some online instructors are uncertain what skills are needed to improve the public speaking assignment because the public speaking course curriculum is traditionally taught on ground campuses (Van Ginkel, Gulikers, Biemans, & Mulder, 2015).

This problem is key to online instructors charged with teaching students to deliver an oral presentation which is defined as giving an address to a public audience. When a speech is given in a silo without many people in attendance the author of the speech does not receive the same kind of immediate feedback as in a live well attended audience (Van Ginkel, et al., 2015). The researcher identified specific curriculum strategies as a possible model for online instructors teaching oral communication. The study fills a gap in exploring the general problem of online oral communication deficiencies and communicate the best practices for teaching the public speaking assignment to undergraduate students in an online course.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of the larger qualitative exploratory study was to explore the curriculum strategies higher education instructors need to strengthen the oral communication skills of online undergraduate students (DiPeri, 2020). If an online instructor is successful in producing strong oral communication skills in online students, they may be contributing to their chances of employment. Instructors have the ability to help the university produce students with long term success in oral skills. Employers have put pressure on universities to produce graduates with oral communication skills, making the topic part of an important phenomenon to explore (Grossman & Johnson, 2015). The researcher asked open ended questions about the participants' experiences with improving oral communication in the online modality. The researcher uncovered the details of how and how often student oral presentation opportunities were given in the online classroom. Golombisky (2016) postulated that practice helps but desensitizes the student to communication apprehension. The research method for this study was a qualitative exploratory study with 10 participants taken from the population of interest which consists of online instructors with at least 3 years of experience teaching online, who have taught an online course requiring an online oral presentation deliverable.

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