

DEVELOPMENT OF A SELF-DIAGNOSIS GUIDE TO ASSESS THE INITIAL PROFICIENCY LEVEL OF THE STUDENT OUTCOME “EFFECTIVE ORAL COMMUNICATION”

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Abstract

Among the different student outcomes that scholars should achieve during their University studies, “Effective Oral Communication” is one of the most important ones since being an excellent communicator is essential not only for their professional careers but also for their social life. However, the different provenance of students when arrived at University results in most cases in a huge disparity in the mastery of the outcome, which makes it difficult to work in class through collective activities. In order to solve this problem, in this work, the development of a self-diagnosis guide to assess the initial mastery level of the “Effective Oral Communication” student outcome is proposed. With this tool, both students and teachers will have a complete knowledge of the initial level of the outcome in order to detect the weaknesses and strengths in its mastery outcome. Therefore, the proposed self-diagnosis guide will permit teachers to adapt the activities to work the outcome in class to the actual level of their students which will result in a higher improve of the mastery level of the outcome.

Keywords: Student outcome, Effective Oral Communication, self-diagnosis guide.

1 INTRODUCTION

The term student outcomes, as described by ABET [1] literally refers to “*what students are expected to know and be able to do by the time of graduation. These relate to the skills, knowledge and behaviors that students acquire as they progress through the program*”. This term refers to both the desired learning objectives that scholars have to achieve, and the educational, societal, and life effects that result from students being educated. In the first case, student outcomes are the intended goals of a course, program, or learning experience; in the second case, student outcomes are the actual results that students either achieve or fail to achieve during their education or later, or in life [2]. Due to the importance of student outcomes after graduation, most Spanish Universities have introduced into their syllabus several generic student outcomes, such as comprehension and integration, teamwork and leadership, planning and time management and effective communication, etc. Among them, one of the most essential skills that students should demonstrate after graduation is their ability to communicate effectively, i.e. their ability to listen and speak well in order to carry out certain work-related tasks [3]. Therefore, some efforts should be made by teachers not only to work these generic student outcomes in class, but also to properly evaluate them. In addition to this, the different provenance of students when arrived at University results in most cases in a huge disparity, which difficult the work of the outcomes through collective activities. Therefore, the objective of this work is the design of a self-diagnosis guide to assess the initial mastery level of the student outcome “Effective Oral Communication”.

2 METHODOLOGY

In order to develop the self-diagnosis guide, the work was divided in two tasks:

- Task 1. Review of rubrics to evaluate the “Effective Oral Communication” outcome from different Universities to identify the main skills demanded in students, and classification of the skills into different categories.
- Task 2. Formulation of the descriptors for each skill, and design the self-diagnosis guide.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Review of rubrics to evaluate the “Effective Oral Communication” outcome from different Universities to identify the main skills demanded in students, and classification of the skills into different categories

In order to identify the main skills that a student should achieve to have an advanced mastery level of the “Effective Oral Communication” outcome, 10 different rubrics, developed at the Universities next listed, were reviewed [4]. The Universities were: Universitat Politècnica de València, Universidad Estatal de Sonora, University of Central Arkansas, Lane Community College, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, University of Nevada - Reno, Universidad de Cantabria, University of Rhode Island, Stephen F. Austin State University and Louisiana State University. After reviewing all these rubrics, the identified skills were classified into the following categories:

- Personal disposition towards communication
- Quality of the presentation content
- Structure of the speech
- Verbal language: semantic, syntactic and orthographic correction
- Non-verbal language
- Presentation tools

3.2 Formulation of the descriptors for each skill, and design the self-diagnosis guide

Once the different skills have been identified and classified into the 6 categories previously mentioned, different questions about these skills were elaborated, in which the answer should be comprised between 1 and 5 (1 = never/nothing and 5 = always/very much). The questions formulated for each one of the different categories are listed below.

3.2.1 Personal disposition towards communication

When you are in a situation in which some kind of oral communication occurs (conversation between colleagues, conversation with teachers, oral presentations, debates, etc.):

	Never				Always
	1	2	3	4	5
Do you have a favorable attitude towards the speaker?					
Do you participate in the dialogue?					
Do you encourage the participation of other colleagues through your words and attitudes?					

When controversial topics are approached during a conversation due to their ethical, social and/or political connotations with people of opposite ideas to yours,

	Never				Always
	1	2	3	4	5
Do you accept other points of view?					
Do you seek to express yourself so that the message is not racist, sexist, classist, etc?					
Do you question your own point of view on that subject?					

When your work or contribution is criticized/judged/evaluated in a conversation,

	Never				Always
	1	2	3	4	5
Do you accept the criticisms and show a respectful attitude to the one who transmits them to you?					

3.2.2 *Quality of the presentation content*

When you perform an oral presentation,

	Nothing				Very much
	1	2	3	4	5
How relevant is the information that you are presenting?					

	Never				Always
	1	2	3	4	5
Do you transmit the information in a way that is easily understandable by the audience?					
Do you support your ideas by using examples, analogies and/or metaphors?					

	Nothing				Very much
	1	2	3	4	5
In which grade do you encourage the audience participation and debate by making questions?					

When you answer a question,

	Never				Always
	1	2	3	4	5
Do you do it accurately, answering exactly to the question?					
Do you base your answers based on theoretical frameworks, examples, reasoning, etc?					

3.2.3 *Structure of the speech*

	Never				Always
	1	2	3	4	5
Do the ideas presented follow a clear structure and a logical sequence?					

	Nothing				Very much
	1	2	3	4	5
To what degree does the structure of your presentation fit the scheduled time?					
In which grade does the organization of the contents and the illustration of your presentations encourage the curiosity and motivation of the audience?					

3.2.4 Verbal language: semantic, syntactic and orthographic correction

In your presentations,

	Never				Always
	1	2	3	4	5
Do you use a varied and rich vocabulary?					
Do you incorporate specific vocabulary of the matter of the speech?					
Do you use short, direct and meaningful sentences?					
Do you avoid making grammatical errors (subject-verb agreement, speech disfluencies, etc)?					
Do you avoid spelling mistakes?					
Do you avoid the excessive use of filler words? (okay, uh, um, etc)?					
Do you adapt the speech language to the audience?					

3.2.5 Non-verbal language

When you perform an oral presentation,

	Never				Always
	1	2	3	4	5
Do you show calmness and security?					
Do you express yourself easily and naturally, avoiding reciting from memory?					
Do you pronounce and vocalize properly?					
Do you adapt the tone and volume of your voice to the speech?					
Is the speech performed at an appropriate rhythm?					
Do you move naturally through the space?					
Do you search eye contact with the audience, alternating the contact between the audience and the presentation?					
Do you use gestures that accompany and reinforce the speech? For example, to point in one direction or a photograph, or to stretch two fingers of the hand while saying that two key ideas will be presented, etc.					
Do you avoid gestural tics or movements that can distract the public? For example, scratching, playing with a pen or ring, brushing hair, putting on glasses, etc.					
Are you able to connect with your audience?					
Do you consider the type of audience your message is aimed at to adapt verbal and non-verbal language?					
Do you adequate your personal image to the message of the presentation?					

3.2.6 Presentation tools

	Nothing				Very much
	1	2	3	4	5
In which grade do you domain your usual presentation tool? (For example, MS PowerPoint, Prezi, Google Presentations, etc.)?					

When you design the slides of your presentation,

	Never				Always
	1	2	3	4	5
Do you select the background colors, type and size of the letter you are going to use, so that they are the most appropriate?					

	Nothing				Very much
	1	2	3	4	5
In which grade do you use images, videos or other visual supports that could contribute to a better understanding of the speech?					
Do you balance the use of texts, images, effects, transitions, etc?					
In which grade do you design the presentation to emphasize/reinforce the key ideas of the speech so that the message arrives and is better understood?					

	Never				Always
	1	2	3	4	5
In which grade do you include connectors, markers, etc. that position the audience at the exact point of the presentation?					

	Nothing				Very much
	1	2	3	4	5
In which grade do you think about the animations and transitions to be used?					
The means of support you use in the presentation (text, images, vocabulary, examples, etc.), in which degree do you adapt them to the type of audience / context / schedule?					
In which grade do you use other means of support in a creative way, in addition to the conventional ones?					

4 CONCLUSIONS

In this work, a self-diagnosis guide to assess the initial mastery level of the student outcome “Effective Oral Communication” has been developed. For this purpose, the main skills that a student should achieve to have an advanced mastery level of the outcome has been identified and classified into 6 categories (personal disposition towards communication; quality of the presentation content; structure of the speech; verbal language: semantic, syntactic and orthographic correction; non-verbal language and presentation tools). Next, a total of 46 questions related to the skills previously identified were formulated, and then the self-diagnosis guide was elaborated. According to the rates obtained in all descriptors, the mastery level of the students will be ranked in one of the following three levels: low, medium or high mastery. With this guide, both students and teachers will have a complete knowledge of the initial level of the outcome in order to detect the weaknesses and strengths in its mastery. Therefore, the proposed self-diagnosis guide will permit teachers to adapt the activities to work the outcome in class to the actual level of their students which will result in a higher improve on the mastery level of the “Effective Oral Communication” outcome.

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