

Persuasive Communication: What Do Existing Literature Tells Us About Persuasive Communication Among Students?

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ABSTRACT

In comparison to studies on the improvement of students' motivation to learn in class, there is a lack of studies on the improvement of students' ability to motivate others to learn in class by persuasion. Meanwhile, Education Department students who are future teachers are expected and evaluated on their ability to be persuasive. As a first step to address this gap, this present study aims to review the current literature on the persuasiveness of students. Specifically, this study proposed the research question "What do existing literature tells us about persuasive communication among students?" Using keyword-based search as a basis for the library research method, from 269,000 results from Google Scholar this qualitative study collected a total of 76 as raw data over 3 months from October to December 2019. With NVivo 12 software, this present study selected only the most relevant studies to the research question to be analyzed. Analysis on the remaining 16 studies indicated that research interest in persuasive communication among students is increasing during the last five years. Many of the students' involved in such studies, however, are mainly English, Business, or English Business students. There is still room to explore and learn more about persuasive communication with other types of variable and demography.

1. Introduction

In the discourse of the improvement of students' English speaking skills, public speaking as well as grammar improvement for intelligibility were the two most taught skills in classes. This is due to the "demand of the academic disciplines as well as the versatility and competitiveness in today's job market prompting scholars, educators and researchers to emphasise the importance of learners' success in handling oral communication skills" (Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2016). Not only will acquiring and mastering public speaking skills and fluency improve their professional lives, students are also more taken with the proven idea that the skills would help them improve their performance in presentation activities, small group discussions, negotiating and answering questions in class, as well as demonstrating ideas (Gistituati, Refnaldi, & Syaifullah, 2018).

On top of creativity in using language, public speaking and grammar correctness are particularly emphasised for English students who are majoring in Education Department (Derin, Deliani, Fauziah, Afifah, & Hamuddin, 2019; Rao, 2018), and almost emphasised more than writing skill (Hamuddin, Kurniawan, Syaifullah, & Herdi, 2018). As future teachers, these university students are ultimately judged on their ability to prove their competence to potentially be hired and work as teachers and educators. The studies on students' public speaking and grammar correctness are certainly not lacking, there is a plethora of extra classes, seminars, or workshops to entice and train these skills for students, and there is no short of advices from teachers and lecturers on the importance of mastering both skills (Yusuf & Anwar, 2019). As a matter of fact, English Education students are often graded on their ability to communicate with a decent level of fluency and a decent level of confidence in public (Herlinawati, 2011; Yunira, 2019).

However, in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) for students who are future teachers, a frequently neglected aspect of teaching and improving English speaking skill in the classrooms is the persuasiveness of the communication. Discourse elements such as syntax, lexicon, and meanings are frequently addressed, but something as specific such as the persuasiveness of a student's speech are rarely taught, if spoken of, in class (Derin, Putri, Nursafira, & Hamuddin, 2020). Yet it is simultaneously a significant factor for how English Education students are perceived and judged by their lecturers and supervisors.

Education students are commonly tested through microteaching (Williams, Pickett, & McGill, 2019). In essence a mock-teaching, this is where each student must teach a certain lesson unit to their classmates who will pretend to be kindergarteners, elementary schoolers, junior high school students, or senior high school students depending on the chosen lesson unit. The latter two demographic types are the levels that English Education students are mainly trained to teach for. The lecturers who test the students must evaluate their teaching phases, which typically includes greeting, roll call, warming up, lesson, exercise, test, follow-up, feedback, and home assignment. These future teachers are also tested on their ability to motivate their students so that they will learn about the subject, at the very least in class and ideally even after class time is over (Lee & Davis, 2017).

However, compared to the studies on increasing students' motivation and motives to learn (Lazowski & Hulleman, 2016; Hamuddin, Syahdan, Rahman, Rianita, & Derin, 2019), there is a dearth of studies on increasing students' ability to persuade others to learn. While there are plenty of studies on persuasion in other communication contexts, mainly politics and marketing, there seems to be less in the context of education. Therefore, this present study is highly interested to review existing studies on persuasive communication, especially ones that focused on students' ability in employing persuasive strategies. The contribution this study offered is a recommendation of the most suitable ways to improve students' persuasive communication.

2. Review of Persuasion Theory

Persuasion is a communicative process of altering the beliefs, attitudes, intentions, or behaviour of another by the conscious and unconscious use of words and nonverbal messages (Hamm & Dunbar, 2006; Stiff & Mongeau, 2016). The concept of persuasion has been developed between the 1940s and 1950s after studies aimed at defining the optimal persuasive effectiveness of Propaganda, being it political or an advertising campaign. In an ideal sense, however, persuasive speech is used to influence both individuals and groups to accept a particular position or belief. Persuasive speech requires a clear

understanding of the audience and an intense listener focus.

The awareness stage of the persuasive speech is an introduction to the nature of the problem or situation. Audience understanding of the problem requires a concise problem statement from the speaker's point of view. It is important at this stage to show the relevancy of the problem to the audience: how the problem can or is affecting the audience. The speaker then describes the proposed solution or solutions to the problem and guides the audience into imagining how the proposed solution will be beneficial to them. Finally, the speaker enlists the audience's aid in implementing the proposed solution by indicating what actions, individually and collectively, must be taken.

Regarding the message, persuasion theory identified four factors that facilitate and reinforce the persuasion process:

- a) The credibility and reputation of the communicator. It implies the acceptance of the message by a receiver: the level of persuasion is low if the producer of the message is considered not credible or reliable.
- b) The order of statements. In this respect there are two different schools of thought: some consider it more effective to put opinions supporting a defined position at the beginning of the message transmitted (primacy effect); others sustain the opposite (regency effect).
- c) Completeness of statements. If receivers are not in favor of a certain opinion, the persuasion increases when a message contains both supporting and contrasting statements regarding the opinion. If receivers agree on a certain opinion or are not knowledgeable or educated, it is better a message includes only pros of the opinion supported. In any case, it has negative effect in terms of persuasion if any relevant topic about an opinion is omitted in the content of the message.
- d) Announcement of conclusions. If a receiver is interested in a message it is better to not state the conclusions of the message, but to leave them implicit.

Persuasion theory even has a scientific formula. It includes three key generators of people's identities that are highly persuasive to change people's attitudes and behaviors, which are values, beliefs, and motivations.

Value + Beliefs + Motives = Attitudes → Behavior

People use this formula when they want to persuade another individual or an audience. To persuade other people or an audience, the speaker should take the audience through five stages of understanding in a persuasive speech: a) awareness of

the problem, b) understanding the problem, c) understanding the proposed solution, d) visualization of the effects of the proposed solution, and e) understanding how they, the audience, must act.

These five steps are necessary to maximize the use of persuasion theory, especially in certain settings such as: a) politics in order to promote certain candidates, persuade voters to switch their preference, convince masses about needed changes or about the validity of certain political commitment for society, b) business: in advertising and positioning products or services in consumers' mind, to persuade prospects to switch supplier, to create a need for new products, to sustain sales of cash cows businesses, to change organizational structure or implement a project, and c) conflicts and negotiations, which are the bread and butter of diplomatic situations.

3. Method

The research question proposed by this study is “What do existing literature tells us about persuasive communication among students?” Because this study focused on reviewing the literature, the design of this study is largely qualitative rather than quantitative (Silverman, 2016). The data collection duration spanned across three months, from October 2019 to December 2019, to account for thoroughness of the relevant literature. The flow of this study's research design is depicted on **Figure 2.1**.

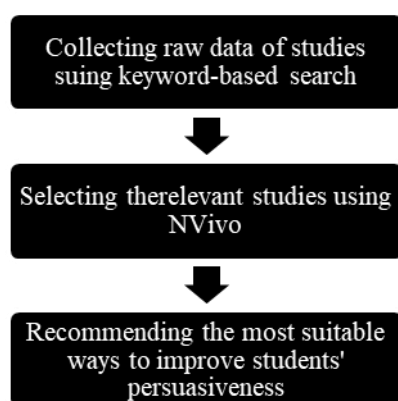


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Firstly, this study collected articles that discussed about persuasive communication. There are thousands of these studies that have been published over the years by researchers from different backgrounds. The problem lies on the limited access to review all the approaches, so this study collected data from Google Scholar. This repository is chosen because it indexes studies that are accessible and which documents are downloadable with free of charge. This study conducted a library research as a natural qualitative approach, using specific keywords such as ‘persuasive,

‘communication’, and ‘students’ to collect the raw data for this study.

Secondly, this study filtered the raw data to obtain only the relevant studies to answer the research question. This present study used the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) known as NVivo, which enables researchers to easily manage data analysis and synthesis, “from screening to synthesising” (Houghton, Murphy, Meehan, Thomas, Brooker, & Casey, 2017). Its strength is its capacity to let researchers organize through a plethora of data, facilitating researchers with multiple textual and audio-visual-related functions (Edhlund & McDougall, 2019). With NVivo's text query, this present study narrowed down the data to be analysed, excluding studies that were not included in the context of persuasive communication among students.

Thirdly, this study reviewed the selected relevant studies in order to recommend the most suitable ways to improve students' persuasiveness. These recommended approaches may be used as methods for further study of researchers in the same field regarding students' competence as future teachers.

4. Results

This present study considered persuasion as a communicative process of altering another's beliefs, attitudes, and behavior by way of words and nonverbal messages. With the aim to collect studies that have relevance with persuasiveness in the classroom context, this current study chose certain keywords to aid the data collection. Google Scholars search on ‘persuasive’, ‘communication’, and ‘students’ resulted in roughly more 269,000 results. Over the course of 3 months from October 2019 to December 2019, this study collected a raw data of 76 studies. These studies were collected out of convenience, for their open access feature to be downloaded in their entirety, and have not been selected for the specific research purpose of this study. To narrow it down, this study used NVivo software to analyse the contents of the raw data. In the end, the numerical results of the existing literature on persuasive communication involving students are 16 studies. Table 1 shows the NVivo software's word frequency analysis of the 16 studies.

Table 1. Word Frequency Analysis

Word	Frequency
Students	565
Speech	444
Communication	437
Speaking	394
Persuasive	331
Participants	303
Course	298

Use	278
Facts	253
Information	246

Table 1 shows that the 16 studies were, in fact, quite relevant to answer the question of “*What do existing literature tells us about persuasive communication among students?*” With NVivo, researchers produced a cluster analysis to show the relationship of each words, shown on **Figure 2**.

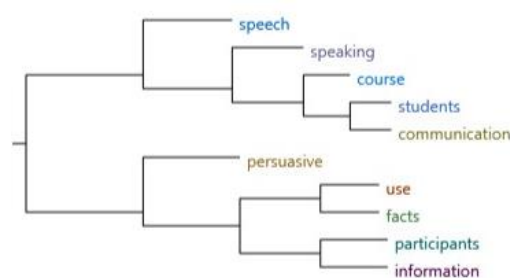


Figure 2. Cluster Analysis

This present study’s concern on the lack of preparation on training students’ persuasive communication is confirmed by Al-Tamimi & Shuib (2016). The study identified the skills of public speaking that are frequently used by students in Education Department. Eventually, the study found that certain types of speech including persuasive speech are less frequently practiced in the students’ academic discourse. Consequently, majority of students experience moderate level of apprehensiveness when they communicate. Furthermore, the apparent focus on speaking classes are mainly to promote students’ active stances in oral interactions, so there are less emphasis on other crucial skills (Fauzan, 2017).

It is a common 21st century understanding that critical thinking and debate are crucial skills that are demanded on the new and old generations. The practices in classrooms do prepare students in using the skills, but do not prepare students to use it in a competitive way. Hahn (2015) brought light onto the issue of how students are not adequately prepared for “real situations when they must present a proposal and advocate it against competing proposals.” Rather than replacing in-class debates, the study developed five biweekly 90-minute sessions where students fine-tune their rebuttal skills, comparative arguments, personal ethos, and simultaneously emphasize student interests and activism as a way to include students who may not fully engage in the original classroom debates. The highlight of this study is the significant improvement on students’ persuasive skills as they are particularly interested in learning how to speak

confidently when they were deliberating about how money should be spent when they present their proposals.

To gain insight on the kind of persuasive tactics that are commonly used in the discourse of questioning and answering, Adaji & Vassileva (2016) tracked the persuasive principles or patterns that are authentically employed. The persuasive principles used to support and enhance dialogues include praises, rewards, reminders, suggestions, and similarities. Cooperation, competition, and recognition are also some principles of persuasiveness that students can use to improve their communication.

In a similar echo, Youssef, Ham, & Okada (2016) studied persuasiveness in both educational and information and communication technological contexts. Specifically, the study compared the effects of different persuasive sources (i.e. a persuasive text, instructions from an animated robot, and a persuasive speech from a human) in persuading students to continue answering questions rather than skipping the tests after they have failed previously. The uniqueness of this study is its emphasis on differentiating two typical types of thinking that students universally use, which are based on contemplation (thought-minded) and feeling (relational). Not only does the study’s exploration determined that relational students are easier to be persuaded, it seems that both humans and robots help students overcome their timidity of prevailing after initial failure.

Students’ timidity in speaking is also not the only problem encountered in persuasive communication. Delivering persuasive presentation is a challenging task and one of the difficult parts is grasping the attention of audiences during the critical situations, such as in the early morning or after the lunch break. Students often do not pay significant attention to any speeches or presentations occurred in the classroom due to some lapses of attention span such as poor listening, yawns, blurred visual images, and noisy situations. For these reasons, Luke & Soraya (2017) explored some persuasive tactics that should be used. Popularly known as SCREAM rhetorical devices, these are simile, contrast, rhyme, echo, alliteration, and metaphor. Investigating university students who are conducting presentations, the study found that echo is the most used device by a far margin, and the least used is alliteration.

Another study that identified persuasive tactics is Fauzi & Ilahi (2017), who focused on role models. Role models are one of the most common ways to motivate students to learn. The study tried to see if a memorable speech by Malala Yousafzai, who is an icon among students and education activists around the globe, can be integrated as a material in English Language Teaching. The study found requests, suggestions, promises, and assertions from the video to be compatible with the syllabus of English subjects,

and that students may prefer one or the other rather than force themselves to employ all of them in one performance.

The difference of uses of persuasive tactics is not merely a question of preference, but also because people hold different mental states that may influence the core of their persuasion. Lonigro, Baiocco, Baumgartner, & Laghi (2017) surprisingly found that affective empathy play a very marginal role in students' verbal ability of persuasion, whereas the theory of mind is a main predictor of persuasion ability.

With the understanding that gestures are a significant and inseparable part of speech that makes or breaks how persuasive one can be, Peters & Hoetjes (2017) addressed the gap of how there is not many studies on the effect that hand gestures have on the way people perceive a speech, particularly a persuasive speech. Conducting a comparison of perceptions between a speech with gestures and a speech without gestures, the study enhanced the literature's understanding as the study found that factual accuracy is also a significant variable in persuading people.

This finding is interesting because there is a common sense that facts *do not* enhance persuasiveness. In fact, facts are often replaced with stories because they are known to be powerful persuasive devices. Stories can capture attention, evoke emotion, and entrance listeners in a manner that reduces resistance to a message. Given the powerful persuasive potential of stories, one might deduce that it is best to embed one's facts within a story. In contrast to this perspective, Krause & Rucker (2019) suggested that coupling facts with stories can either enhance or undermine persuasion. Specifically, to understand when facts benefit from the use of stories, this work provides a deeper examination of how counterargument reduction—a common explanation for the unique persuasive capabilities of stories—operates. The study reported that evidence is found for when it is more effective to embed facts within a story versus to use facts alone.

In line with this study, McGeough & Rudick (2018) explored the other common sense of students who believe that facts *do* enhance persuasiveness. This common sense is often realized with the phrase that "it was at the library, therefore, it must be true." The study interviewed students enrolled in communication courses to ascertain their information literacy for vetting sources for their public speeches. From the data of responses, the study generated four patterns in students decision-making when they made appeals to justify or legitimize their selection of evidence within their persuasive public speech, which are appeals to authority, appeals to form, appeals to popularity, and appeals to ideology.

Other than classroom avenues, students learn to improve their communication in communication centres that offer tutoring. As the fundamental reasoning behind implementing tutoring, tutoring can supplement the material that students learn in their classes, enabling them to engage that material on a deeper level at any stage in their learning process. Davis, Jacobs, & Linvill (2017) studied how these communication centres affect students' expected speech outcomes and found that, indeed, they help students' improve. However, assessing how certain techniques or activities affect or improve certain skills is already often explored. Studies on these learning outcomes also tend to prioritize the perspective of the teachers and supervisors. Thus, Anderson, Gardner, & Wolvin (2017) sought to understand how students perceive their learning gains after taking communication courses. With a comprehensive sample of 2,500 students' narrative accounts, the study found that they are evidence of students' verbal and nonverbal improvement and mastery of course principles.

A significant motivation students have in engaging communication courses and activities is their beliefs and apparent fact that persuasive communication is an integral qualification for skilled, verbal, and interactive jobs. In determining if this is true, Stern, Chobany, Beam, Hoover, Hull, Linsenbigler, Makdad-Light, & Rubright (2017) tested to compare natural speech and speech generating devices in the context of applying for occupations using videos. The study found that the persuasive appeals were not typical of a hiring situation, however they were due to the video clip scenes being not equivalent to typical interpersonal interactions and do not necessarily depict how the speech generating device is used by people with complex communication needs. Furthermore, the students in the study had neither the experiences nor motivations that interviewers have in bona fide hiring situations. A far more involved study would need to be designed to consider such factors as an organization's hiring practices, history of granting accommodations, understanding of the rights of people with disabilities and appreciation of diversity.

Finally, a salient study on persuasive communication is Orvell, Kross, & Gelman (2018) who focused on persuasiveness of pronouns in the norm of people's social lives. The study suggested that a subtle linguistic cue, which is the generic usage of the word "you" for people in general than a specific individual actually carries a persuasive force. Indeed, the study's findings indicate that the generic-you functions as a linguistic nudge that carries persuasive force. Broadly, they add to a growing body of literature on how subtle linguistic shifts can meaningfully influence the way people are affected with one's speech. Therefore, further studies in linguistic cues may be a new avenue to improve the persuasive communication among students.

5. Conclusion

From 269,000 results from Google Scholars, this present study managed to collect 76 studies that were accessible in their entirety as raw data, and selected 16 of the most relevant studies using NVivo 12 software. Among the 16 selected studies, there are some concerns in teaching persuasive communication that educators must re-evaluate, and there are some excellent ways explored to enhance and improve students' persuasiveness. It seems that the most suitable and practical solution this present study recommend is Hahn's (2015) persuasive proposal advocacy sessions. Not only does the method would introduce and familiarize students to debate and public speaking, it also trains students to conduct the skills in a persuasive and competitive ways that are in line with the demands of the 21st century.

Ultimately, this study revealed how Education students perceive the ability to persuade someone else. At least among students, they are divided between the idea of whether a fact strengthens or weakens persuasiveness. Students that do not find facts to be persuasive use stories and employ empathy when they try to persuade someone or audience. However, empathy has been proven to play a marginal role compared to theory of mind in students' verbal ability of persuasion, so the students who do find facts to be persuasive often appeal to authority, form, popularity, and also ideology. Finally, studying persuasive communication among Education students also revealed that the generic usage of the word "you" rather than the usage of referencing a specific individual is a powerful, subtle linguistic cue or persuasive communication.

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