

Universitatea Alexandru Ioan Cuza din Iași

Școala Doctorală de Științe ale Educației

PhD Thesis Summary

**THE EFFECTS OF
A PUBLIC SPEAKING DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
IN ENGLISH
ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

**EFECTELE UNUI PROGRAM
DE DEZVOLTARE A ABILITĂȚILOR DE PUBLIC SPEAKING,
ÎN LIMBA ENGLEZĂ,
ASUPRA ELEVILOR DE LICEU**

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Abstract

This research comprises two interrelated studies, with the first forming the foundational basis for the second. Study I aimed to gain insight into English Digital Oratory (EDO) instruction at the high school level, hypothesizing that EDO requires unique skills and teaching methods distinct from traditional public speaking (PS). Employing a mixed-methods approach, a structured questionnaire was distributed to 52 communication experts globally. This facilitated comparative analyses and yielded valuable information regarding the integration of multimedia, connectivism, and constructivism learning theories in EDO training, addressing key research questions about instructional outcomes, obstacles, and quality assurance in EDO. The findings indicated significant overlaps between DO and PS skills and highlighted distinct characteristics of EDO, namely creativity, active listening, leadership, and feedback for digital orators and increased relevance of delivery techniques over traditional speech writing. The use of multimedia resources, networking for knowledge exchange, and interactive learning were identified as essential for enhancing EDO comprehension and performance. These results suggest the transformative potential of EDO instruction, advocating a shift toward audience-centered approaches that leverage technology.

Study II was an experiment which included designing, implementing, and evaluating an EDO course aimed at improving PS skills appropriate for communicating with online audiences for both individuals with average and high intelligence, as well as for those with superior intelligence. The main research objective was to validate the effectiveness of an EDO curriculum tailored to high school students. A six-month course was conducted on Google Classroom with 100 Romanian high school students, many of whom had superior intelligence (N = 49). The participants were organized into six groups, each guided by experienced coaches, employing a before-and-after testing framework. Results revealed significant improvements in PS performance, self-esteem, and attitude toward school, particularly among students with higher English proficiency levels (B2 and C1). These outcomes validate the effectiveness of the EDO course in enhancing DO skills and underscore the necessity of integrating DO into secondary education curricula.

Keywords: digital oratory, public speaking, EFL, intelligence, self-esteem, course design

CHAPTER I. Public Speaking, the Transformative Competence

Introduction

Public speaking (PS) is a dynamic fusion of art and science, where a speaker crafts and delivers structured, purposeful communication aiming to inform, persuade, or entertain an audience. PS involves astutely assessing audience needs and contextual nuances, setting precise speaking goals, and mastering composition and delivery. It encompasses the strategic use of visuals, the control of para-verbal elements (such as articulation, enunciation, vocal tone, intonation, pitch, pace, pauses, and projection), and the adept management of non-verbal cues (including posture, appearance, eye contact, facial expression, movement, body language, proxemics, and haptics), all orchestrated with impeccable timing to engage the audience and achieve the desired impact.

PS is a transferable skill calling on cognitive, psychological, psychomotor, linguistic, and para-linguistic abilities simultaneously. It relies on critical thinking, problem-solving, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis, categorized as higher-order thinking skills within Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy. PS also involves affective skills such as motivation and anxiety, along with the psychomotor domain related to behavior. Scholars (Hunter et al., 2014; Suwinvattichaiporn & Broeckelman-Post, 2016; Westwick et al., 2015) emphasize the benefits of PS instruction, including improved self-reported communication competence (Broeckelman-Post & Pyle, 2017) and reduced anxiety and communication apprehension (Broeckelman-Post et al., 2011; Broeckelman-Post & Hosek, 2014).

The rapid ascent of PS in English is attributed to the worldwide prevalence of English as a Lingua Franca. Digital platforms and social media have enabled the extensive dissemination of English-language content, fueling the demand for proficient English public speakers. Lucas (2013, p. 164) points out that the advent of competitions has helped English PS grow into an expanding educational movement. According to Cramond (1993), PS competence significantly benefits gifted individuals by enhancing their cognitive and affective growth. Similarly, Cretu's (1997, 2009) 'global success' model posits the interconnection of internal psychological factors and external influences in giftedness, advocating for formal and informal learning experiences that engage students both emotionally and cognitively.

Public Speaking Anxiety

Heightened nervousness when speaking to audiences, known as Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA), can lead to avoidance of PS, profound distress, anxiety, lowered self-esteem, and diminished self-confidence. PSA is aggravated when the language of communication is not the speaker's mother tongue and is widespread among EFL learners, even those proficient in English (Elmenfi &

Gaibani, 2016). Despite their advanced cognitive abilities and high academic performance, gifted learners also experience significant levels of communication apprehension and apprehension related to negative evaluation. Kamarulzaman et al.(2013) identified the negative interplay between language anxiety and high-ability learners' academic performance.

Students in online PS classes tend to have a moderate level of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) (Sulistiyowati & Mukti, 2023), lower compared to face-to-face classes (Kimani, 2021; Rahmi & Murtafi'ah, 2022). Online platforms are less threatening for shy and withdrawn learners, potentially reducing anxiety levels during virtual presentations (Ferreira Marinho et al., 2017). Strategies to cope with anxiety vary between online and offline contexts, with students employing more coping mechanisms for in-person speaking anxiety compared to online scenarios. Boyce et al. (2007) demonstrated that early intervention and practice in PS can help reduce PSA. Targeted skill training, ample practice opportunities, and the provision of supportive environments that foster confidence and reduce fear of negative evaluation can mitigate these anxieties (Kelsen, 2019). Moreover, cognitive modification and systematic desensitization (M. Allen et al., 1989a), actively seeking feedback, and participating in PS forums (Raja, 2017) have also proven to be effective. Ebrahimi et al. (2018) found that enhanced self-regulation and empathy improve speaking performance among EFL learners. Some innovative methods for addressing PSA involve Virtual Reality Therapy (VRT) (North et al., 1997) and Kimani's (2021) *virtual presentation coach* employing cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to reduce PSA and improve an overall presentation experience.

Assessing Public Speaking Competence

The validity and reliability of PS rubrics have been scarcely examined (Morreale, 2007a; Schreiber et al., 2012), and the same situation can be observed in the problematic situation of such instruments being used by expert and non-expert raters (J. Joe et al., 2015; J. N. Joe et al., 2011). The shift from traditional human evaluation to technology-based methods represents a crucial advancement in the PS field. Batrinca et al. (2013a) developed an automated system that uses computer vision and machine learning techniques to analyze nonverbal PS behaviors. Similarly, Silverstein and Zhang's (2003) real-time feedback system for immediate speech adjustments addresses the problem of feedback delays in traditional speech performance.

Public Speaking Education

Inquiry into effective PS instruction shows that it is crucial to be provided starting at least at the high school level. PS education is increasingly incorporating digital platforms and virtual training methods, reflecting the global shift toward online and hybrid communication, and is mostly provided at the university level.

Public Speaking Education in Romania

Despite the clear need for PS education, it is largely absent in schools worldwide and notably unavailable for Romanian high school students, with limited research on its instruction and effectiveness. At the academic level, PS receives extremely limited attention, being offered as optional training and as part of professional development programs. Few schools include PS in their supplementary curriculum offer (CDS), while a few others rely on adopting communication components into their EFL classes or organizing speech and debate clubs. However, such initiatives remain isolated and mostly dependent on the enthusiasm of a small number of teachers.

CHAPTER II. From Public Speaking to Digital Oratory

Digital Oratory

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered an unprecedented paradigm shift and accelerated the ongoing surge in online communication, leading to changes as transformative as Gutenberg's invention of the printing press. Lind (2012) anticipated the rise of DO to the status of one of the most significant types of PS and described it "as a thesis-driven, vocal, embodied public address that is housed within (online) new media platforms (and that ideally takes advantage of the developing/flux-laden conventions that the online video context provides)" (p. 3).

Owing to its enormous popularity and addressability, this new form of public discourse demands the attention of oratory scholars and educators (Anderson, 2016; Butler, 2017; DigiRhet.org, 2006; Eyman, 2012; Lind, 2012; Morreale et al., 2019; Rossette-Crake, 2019; Ward, 2016). Marwick and Boyd (2011) suggest re-examining DO, recognizing the complex nature of self-presentation and how online audiences perceive it. They share Baron's (2015) concerns about the potential conflict between digital proficiency and oratorical depth. Furthermore, Van Dijk (2010) warns about technological inequality, emphasizing how economic and social barriers can limit the universal applicability of DO, while Miller and Slater's (2000) suggest that cultural considerations are necessary for approaching DO.

Digital Oratory and Public Speaking Shared Ground

Research has advanced some analysis and theorization of digital rhetoric (Eyman, 2015, 2016; Hess & Davisson, 2017; Hodgson, 2019; Jenkins, 2006; Jensen & Helles, 2011; Kedrowicz & Taylor, 2016; Warnick & Heineman, 2012). Zappen (2005) calls for an integrated theory of digital rhetoric to address the current fragmented nature of the field and to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding digital communication. Eyman (2016) reinterpreted the traditional rhetorical appeals for the digital communication context: *ethos* in digital spaces extends beyond the speaker's credibility to include online identity construction, reputation management, and community-based endorsement systems; *pathos* is enhanced through the multimodal capabilities of digital media, and *logos* benefits from the hypertextuality of the web; digital *kairos* has new dimensions through the temporal and spatial flexibility of online communication.

Similar to PS instruction, DO is rooted in the five canons of rhetoric initially articulated by Cicero, the Roman philosopher in *De Inventione* (2001), which provide a foundational framework for creating impactful speeches across various contexts. Eyman (2016) shows how the classical canons have been adapted to suit digital communication: *invention* involves using multimodal tools and interacting with online discourse to develop arguments; *arrangement* shifts to non-linear structures like hypertext and tagging; *style* encompasses document and multimedia design elements for audience engagement; *memory* includes digital archiving and retrieval; *delivery* involves using various digital distribution systems for effective communication across networks and platforms.

Specific Features of Digital Oratory

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, remote work and education were no new concepts, yet, at the time, few had experienced the challenges of a fully digital workplace, classroom, or social interactions. The transition to digital platforms has markedly brought synchronicity in communication to the forefront, as videoconferencing is now accessible for professional, non-professional, and educational use. A report from Research and Markets (2020) predicted that the global videoconferencing industry is here to stay.

The DO setup fosters an inclusive and casual environment, which makes it possible for anyone to become a speaker, not just public figures. DO practices address the fundamental elements of digital communication, including synchronicity, content relay, multimodal integration, audience engagement, interactivity and feedback, interaction pathways, global reach, accessibility, flexibility, and versatility. Communication is more time-restricted and less space-constricted since the speaker is free to venture out of the 'stage', with a general tendency to level

out the space; hence, the speaker-audience relation is equalized (Rossette-Crake, 2019). According to Jaffe (2015), DO combines problem orientation, directness, explicitness, informality, and personal involvement. Rational problem-solving, addressing issues head-on with clear, precise language, and logical idea progression are typical in DO. Speeches reflect cultural values of equality and individuality, allowing speakers to convey their messages in a relaxed, approachable manner.

Digital Oratory Pedagogy

Digital pedagogy, the emerging pedagogy of online learning, is highly dynamic, drawing on traditional education theory, sociology, psychology, and technology. The convenience inherent in online instruction is closely connected to the learner-centered approach pioneered by educational thinkers such as Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Rogers—a philosophy embraced by online education (Serdyukov, 2015, p. 65). Susan Ward (2016) warned about the dissonance created by teaching a traditional PS course online, which she deems inadvisable since it cannot accurately reflect its intended outcomes. Students cannot be prepared online to deliver speeches to f-t-f audiences, nor can they be trained f-t-f to perform for online audiences (Zappen, 2005).

DO instruction should be essentially skill-based. Evans and Gibbons (2007) pointed out that interactive multimedia can have a positive effect on profound learning by actively involving the learner in e-learning systems. However, there are retention and social integration issues in online communication courses (Allen, 2006). The challenges of the online medium in fostering a sense of community is one of the main causes for concern affecting the success of online training (Callister & Love, 2016; Parlamis & Mitchell, 2014; Reushle & Mitchell, 2012; Schrum et al., 2005; Weiss, 2005). Moreover, in digital classrooms, unprepared, unskilled, demotivated, and dependent students are at risk of failure (Serdyukov, 2015).

Pelts (2004) suggests that despite potential inhibitions in self-expression in asynchronous classes, there are techniques that can ameliorate some of the social presence losses found online. The quality of the learning experience can be significantly improved by placing it within the community of students, thereby transforming teachers into learners as well (Barber & King, 2016). The instructor, who serves as the main figure in the learning process, is critical for its success, the pedagogy defining the instructor's qualifications and dispositions (Serdyukov, 2015). Given that learners are "digital natives," teachers must carefully shift from student digital consumption to digital production. Apart from extensive practice, receiving consistent instructor feedback is a crucial condition for developing oral presentation skills (Kerby & Romine, 2009).

CHAPTER III. Study I. Expert Eye-view of English Digital Oratory Instruction

Our study explored the integration of relevant theories, such as Mayer's Multimedia Learning Theory (2009) and constructivist learning principles (Ertmer & Newby, 1993), underlining the transformative potential of digital platforms in enhancing learning through visual and auditory stimuli. Other modern contemporary frameworks, such as connectivism (Siemens, 2004), further enrich EDO practices by accentuating continuous learning, adaptability to changing information landscapes, and the significance of networking and connecting in the learning process.

Study I Aim, Objectives, and Questions

General Aim: To conceptualize and establish EDO as an independent, skill-based discipline distinct from traditional face-to-face PS.

Objectives

- To create and validate a structured questionnaire for investigating English digital oratory training;
- To identify overlapping and distinct characteristics of digital oratory as compared to traditional public speaking;
- To explore the implications of different factors on the quality and effectiveness of EDO instruction;
- To contribute to theorizing EDO and EDO instruction.

Research Questions

This study situates itself at the intersection of DO and educational methodology, exploring the pedagogical foundations of EDO within high school curricula. This investigation diverges from the existing literature by mapping the contours of EDO as a new field of study while also addressing the pedagogical gap in high school communication education. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, the study aims to provide purposeful insights for effective EDO instruction. To attain this goal, the study addresses the subsequent research questions:

- RQ1: What do experts prioritize regarding outcomes, challenges, quality control measures, and critical content for successful high school-level EDO training?
- RQ2: How do the perspectives of PS trainers differ from DO trainers regarding the desired outcomes, challenges, quality criteria, and instructional content for high school EDO programs?

We openly admit that many rhetoric, oratory, and PS educators engage in both traditional PS and DO. However, this study aimed to discern whether trainers experienced in DO—who also specialize in training individuals for online communication—hold different perspectives compared to those who only have PS training experience. This distinction is critical for understanding EDO instruction, as DO trainers offer invaluable insights into this emerging field.

Study I: Method and Participants

We used a mixed-methods design, which involved creating a structured questionnaire, which was disseminated to communication experts (N=52) from 21 countries across six continents. Our research sample, consisting of 29 females and 23 males, was chosen based on participants' expertise in PS and DO, with various backgrounds, including formal education, PS freelance activities, and speaking communities. All the panel members were experienced in PS training, with half having 6-10 years of experience and the other half having over 11 years of experience. A majority of the experts declared PS their primary occupation, while some had experience training people of all ages. Most had prepared individuals in person for face-to-face audiences, many had trained people online for virtual audiences, and most had conducted hybrid PS courses. Additionally, a large proportion of DO Trainers and PS Trainers had experience training at the high school level, some had conducted research in PS, and a notable number of participants had substantial experience delivering speeches in various communication contexts.

The questionnaire we created for the study was piloted before being sent to the panel group to provide consistency and improve result validity and reliability. We contacted professional networks like Agora Speakers International and Toastmasters, high schools, universities, and online speaking communities, as well as employed a chain sampling process to systematically expand our pool of participants. To analyze the distribution and general trends of the questionnaire data, calculate frequencies, percentages, and means across items, and conduct a comparative analysis, we used Excel and SPSS.

Study I: Results and Discussion

Our results identified a significant skill overlap in PS and DO instruction as well as distinctive elements that set DO apart from traditional PS. While traditional PS focuses on core oratory skills (*communication, argumentation, critical thinking, persuasion*), DO extends beyond these abilities, equipping students to effectively leverage soft skills (*listening skills, self-awareness and self-control*) and *technological skills* to enhance their oratory impact. *Technological skills*, extremely relevant to the digital environment include creating engaging multimedia presentations,

understanding the nuances of digital platforms, and mastering the use of visual aids and video editing tools to enhance the delivery of their message (Salmon, 2013).

The results lay pedagogical prominence on both the linguistic and psychological aspects of EDO. The stress on *communication* and *self-confidence*, paralleled by the communication scholars' acknowledgment of these skills' transformative impact on learners (Henderhan & Fotheringham, 1962; Rodrigues & Vethamani, 2015), reinforces the integral role of EDO courses in enhancing language proficiency and personal growth. Moreover, this emphasis aligns with constructivist principles, fostering cognitive and affective development alongside linguistic skills, which Vygotsky also articulated (1978). Additionally, Bruner's (1986) theory suggests that learning is inherently social and dependent on context, reflecting the principles of constructivism. Experts' emphasis on *vocabulary and fluency* underscores the need for adaptive approaches in digital settings to tackle language difficulties and enhance speaking skills.

Our findings related to *argumentative skills, persuasion, and critical thinking* highlight the bearing of these competencies in fostering effective communication across diverse platforms and audiences. Acknowledging the foundational role of argumentation in oratory (Edwards, 2021; Gehrke, 2016a; Zhang et al., 2020) and DO instruction (Lind, 2012) begs the necessity of these skills to equip students with the ability to engage critically and persuasively with a broad audience. Similarly, the shared recognition of the importance of *clear articulation* by PS and DO trainers reflects a universal pedagogical goal for expressive and precise communication, resonating with historical and contemporary scholarship on speech training (J. O. Anderson & Gray, 1945; Krause & Braida, 2002). The labor market's valuation of *creativity and persuasion* (Petroni, 2019), aligns with the academic perspectives stressing the teachability and critical importance of these skills (Anderson, 2016; Otis, 1954), a view upheld by our survey respondents.

The prioritization of *creativity, leadership, and developing listening skills* in DO training, as practiced by communities like Agora (www.Agoraspeakers.Org, n.d.) and Toastmasters (Yu-Chih, 2008), supports an educational framework that integrates these diverse yet complementary skills. Such a framework aims to fully equip individuals for the nuances of digital communication, promoting adaptability, innovation, and comprehensive skill development. The respondents' interest in skills like *listening and leadership*, which are less emphasized in traditional PS, demonstrates a broader understanding of the impact of rhetoric, suggesting that EDO instruction should foster not only speaking skills but also empathetic, active listening capabilities (Docan-Morgan & Nelson, 2015; Fabian, 2019). Conversely, although leaders necessitate PS skills, few contend that leadership capabilities can be exclusively cultivated through PS alone.

Cassidy (2017) posits that as individuals enhance their speaking abilities, they become more aware of their potential, augmenting their capacity to promote ideas, motivate others, and elevate their future career opportunities alongside their PS skills. This is complemented by a renewed interest in the classical rhetoric principles of *self-awareness and self-control*, with Cicero's (2001) insights on controlling passions resonating with contemporary views on the relevance of these competencies in reducing PS anxiety and enhancing communication effectiveness (Suwinvattichaiyorn & Broeckelman-Post, 2016).

Data collected from our survey revealed a strong consensus on the impact of EDO instruction on *professional development*. This emphasis aligns with existing literature, suggesting that the art of PS, long revered for its potent sway over beliefs and mindsets, significantly impacts personal and professional spheres (Ciortescu, 2020). Research indicates the growing relevance of DO skills in today's digital communication landscape (Docan-Morgan & Nelson, 2015; Lind, 2012; Morreale et al., 2019; Ward, 2016).

Quality content, course design, teaching approach, teacher skills, and students' English language level were considered the essential five quality assurance factors for EDO instruction. These findings are reinforced by scholarly literature, which advocates for a paradigm shift in presentation pedagogy to tackle the unique requirements of the digital realm (Kedrowicz & Taylor, 2016; Schwartzman, 2020). Survey responses collectively recommended *1-3 months* as an optimal duration for an EDO course in high school. This consensus mirrors the structure of adult online PS courses, suggesting a shift toward applying adult education principles to high school EDO curricula. In contrast with the current PS high school courses available, from six weeks to one or two semesters, this preference indicates that courses may extend beyond the optimal duration to achieve effective EDO instruction.

Integrating EDO within educational frameworks can potentially encounter various obstacles, as delineated by our survey: *the absence of teacher training in EDO, deficient technological infrastructure, the lack of a DO tradition and established practices, insufficient support from school management, and a scarcity of teaching materials*. Notably, *parental disinterest in DO* appears to be the least of concerns, suggesting other institutional and infrastructural challenges dominate the landscape of EDO implementation. This reflects the widespread academic push for integrating PS instruction into mainstream education, advocating for its introduction at the high school level at a minimum (Al-Tamimi, 2014; Kahl, 2014b; Wiest & Crawford-Ferre, 2012). The emphasis on in-service teacher training underscores the educators' requirement to have a strong grasp of pedagogy and technology that support effective DO instruction.

The survey unveiled a predilection for speech delivery types, *prepared* and *impromptu*, over speech purpose (*persuasive, informative, demonstrative, key-point, self-introduction, and cultural artifact*). This inclination concurs with instructors' multifaceted decision-making processes, influenced by their educational backgrounds, course traditions, and external standards (Keith, 2016). Poll answers also uncovered a nuanced preference for speech intended effect, aligning with modern digital communication shifts and oratory pedagogy advancements. Results showed a marginal preference for *speeches aimed at motivating and winning over the audience*, with lesser emphasis on *convincing* and *informing* the audience. These preferences resonate with Paradedwari (2017) and Kedrowicz & Taylor (2016), who endorse a speaker-audience connection that is personal and informal, enhancing audience engagement in the digital sphere.

The research results propose a balanced focus on the rhetorical canons, reflecting ongoing scholarly discussions. Classical rhetorical principles constitute the basis for EDO instruction (Morreale et al., 2019). Our investigation advanced our understanding of Gehrke's (2016a) vision for a contemporary 21st-century PS pedagogy, aiming for a balanced approach that bridges the gap between *speech writing* and *delivery*. Respondents exhibited a balanced inclination toward the components of invention, arrangement, and delivery, reflecting a more holistic comprehension of oratory skills. Furthermore, our research underscores the critical role of feedback in DO training, aligning with insights from Gehrke (2015) and Lind (2012), respondents consistently rating *feedback* as highly important for developing effective EDO skills.

Conclusions to Study I

DO is interactive, fluid, dynamic, personal, and casual, and it can surpass temporal, spatial, temporal, and financial limitations, enabling the speaker to access a multicultural online community and audience. DO demands a departure from traditional PS practices and a closer alignment with the tinges shaped and amplified by technology. Learners and teachers' mastery of digital tools, which is integral to the online communication model, sway their discursive design, production, and practice. As the audience takes center stage, without whom there is no speech act, the speaker needs to prioritize delivery over scriptwriting. As such, there is a need for theoretical foundations and comprehensive research in online communication instruction for EDO to gain its rightful place in modern education.

Pioneering EDO instruction might come with extra enthusiasm and the thrill of being a trailblazer. As stage actors cannot seamlessly transition to performing in films due to the disparate setups, the same applies to training individuals for face-to-face communication versus online interaction. The online setting is the sole practical venue for DO training, allowing for an overall

toned-down attitude in the instrumentation of rhetorical devices and practices, less theatrical and more straightforward. EDO pedagogy should be hands-on, feedback-based, learner-centered, fluid, engaging, and technology-assisted and can only be implemented online.

Digital environments call for a re-evaluation of rhetorical strategies (Lanham, 1995). To prepare speakers for online audiences, educational strategies should be flexible and accessible and focus on both the technical and interpersonal aspects of communication, fostering multimodal content and dynamic audience interaction, and emphasizing soft skills, cultural and linguistic adaptability. Our study underscores adaptability in oratory skills, paralleling Lind's (2012) views on audience engagement in digital environments. Contrary to concerns (Turkle, 2011) that digital platforms might dilute the speaker-audience connection, our research reveals an opportunity for deeper engagement through technology. Digital platforms require orators to integrate visuals and auditory stimuli to enhance understanding and retention (Mayer, 2009), hence expanding the rhetorical toolbox beyond classical verbal and written communication methods.

Study I: Limitations and Future Research

Openly acknowledging the constraints of our survey methodology, including limitations related to sample representation and size and survey design, sparks constructive dialogue for future EDO research improvements. Forthcoming studies should strive for a broader participant pool and employ in-depth interviews or focus groups to enhance the representativeness of the findings and a better understanding of EDO practices.

CHAPTER IV. Study II.

Walking the Path Forward, from Public Speaking to Digital Oratory

The transition of PS courses to online platforms has sparked debate among communication educators (T. H. Allen, 2006; Helvie-Mason, 2010; Hunt & Arthur, 2012), with the main issue being whether the online version of classic PS courses (Bailey, 2012; Broeckelman-Post et al., 2019; Clark & Jones, 2001; Linardopoulos, 2010; Westwick et al., 2016) or hybrid courses that blend online and in-person elements (Broeckelman-Post & Pyle, 2017; Nicosia, 2005) can deliver results equivalent to those of traditional f-t-f classes. Simply delivering traditional PS courses online falls short of equipping learners with the skills necessary for effective communication in digital environments.

Ward's (2016) advocacy for a transition toward engaging online audiences marks a shift from conventional PS methodologies to adeptly training individuals to navigate digital platforms. Complementing this perspective, Rossette-Crake's (2020b, p. 3) investigation into the 'New

Oratory’ unveils insights instrumental in refining DO education. With the proliferation of digital platforms, the concept of ‘digital orality’ (Gehrke, 2016a, pp. 251–255) emerges as a vital skill set, which involves leveraging technology not just for creating slick content but also for oratorical skill acquisition to effectively engage and influence online audiences.

The shift to online PS courses has led to both pedagogical challenges and opportunities. Butler (2017) and Ward (2016) list among the distinctive online instructional challenges sustaining student motivation, managing anxiety, ensuring technical proficiency, and adapting rhetorical strategies for virtual engagement. While literature emphasizes the need for communication education at every educational level (Morreale et al., 2000) and the vital role of PS in both personal and professional growth, PS education is conspicuously missing from school programs, especially in primary and secondary schools (Jaffe, 2015; S. Lucas, 2020). In response to this identified gap, we propose a course designed to weave DO skills into the educational fabric at the high school level. By emphasizing instruction in English, the course not only caters to the global exigencies of digital communication but also seeks to cultivate a new generation of communicators adept in DO in English, poised to influence multicultural public discourse.

Study II: Research Aim and Objectives

General Aim: To design, execute, and validate a high school-level course for EFL students, integrating relevant learning theories and best practices to enhance students’ DO competence, self-esteem, and attitude toward school.

Objectives

- To design a high school-level course for EFL students, aiming to develop EDO skills;
- To gain insights into the integration of relevant learning theories in EDO training, PS, EFL, online, and gifted and talented education through the use of an experimental research method;
- To evaluate the impact of EDO instruction on participants’ DO skills, self-esteem, and attitude toward school using both self-reported data and expert assessments;
- To recommend best practices for integrating EDO training into educational frameworks.

Study II: Method and Participants

To determine the effectiveness of our EDO course, we crafted an experiment with controlled conditions, incorporating a pre-test, the course intervention, a post-test, speech evaluations, and thorough data analysis. The curriculum design was informed by relevant educational theories and a literature review and involved drafting a detailed framework, multimedia resource integration,

using digital platforms for content delivery, flipped classroom, scaffolded language support, role-playing, and interactive elements such as workshops, peer mentoring, and feedback loops.

100 Romanian EFL high school students from Colegiul Național “Gheorghe Vrănceanu” in Bacău, Romania, aged 15-17 (mean age 15.11), comprised 28% male and 72% female, with a minimum B1 speaking proficiency level, were selected from a pool of volunteers to participate in the experiment. The six-month EDO course was standardized for all six student groups involved in the experiment and coordinated by a coach via Google Classroom. All coaches had extensive experience in teaching EFL and preparing students for PS and debate competitions in English. Monthly guidance meetings and ongoing professional development ensured course content remained relevant and effective.

Participants completed pre-test (T0) and post-test (T1) questionnaires covering demographic information, needs analysis, attitude toward school, self-reported impact, and course satisfaction. We assessed English proficiency using a CEFR-aligned English-Speaking Assessment Test and intelligence levels with the Raven Progressive Matrices Assessment at T0, and self-esteem using the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (1965) at T0 and T1. Four PS experts evaluated students’ PS competence using Schreiber’s (2012) Rubric at three points: before the intervention (T0) with a baseline recorded speech, after the intervention (T1) with a final recorded speech, and subsequently (T2) with a live final speech in front of an audience. The dataset was compiled using Microsoft Excel and was checked for errors, and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics statistical software.

The English Digital Oratory Course (EDO)

To address challenges in implementing the EDO course, we took proactive measures based on survey findings and scholarly recommendations. The school provided the necessary technological infrastructure and orienteering sessions to assist students with the digital learning environment, and we engaged with all stakeholders to ensure the necessary support and resources.

In creating our EDO conceptual framework, we integrated relevant educational theories to foster a comprehensive, interactive, and learner-centered approach suitable for both normal and gifted, and talented individuals. Fink’s Taxonomy of Significant Learning (2003) provided a unified framework of interconnected factors useful for our course design. By incorporating elements of the Constructivist Learning Theory (Bruner, 1986; Ertmer & Newby, 1993), we actively engaged students and developed their skills through practical scenarios and reflective exercises. The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge Framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) ensured seamless technology integration, while insights from theories on giftedness and

talent, such as Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983) and Sternberg's Theory of Successful Intelligence (1985), allowed us to cater to our participants' diverse cognitive strengths and offer them flexible and personalized learning pathways.

EDO incorporates Morreale's (2019) advice on engagement, skill application, and personalized feedback and the Agora Speakers Model (*Www.Agoraspeakers.Org*, n.d.) focusing on experiential learning, peer evaluation, and community engagement, creating a supportive ecosystem for DO skill refinement. Additionally, we employed Park's (2013) Continuous Improvement Pattern, embedding ongoing evaluation and feedback and technological advancements to ensure the program meets participants' needs.

The course employs visual aids and multimedia resources to enhance comprehension and retention, incorporates a flipped classroom approach for active learning, and provides scaffolded language support to help students construct their speeches. Interactive activities like role-plays, peer mentoring, and feedback loops for iterative improvement encouraged active participation and practical application of language skills, while collaborative projects fostered a supportive environment for practicing oratory skills. Other strategies included explicit instruction on speech structure, modeling through speech analysis, cultural sensitivity training, and simulated speaking environments that ensure non-native speakers develop confidence and proficiency in EDO.

The EDO Teaching Approach

The EDO course involved biweekly live online meetings, each lasting two hours, preceded by a week of independent study. Students took on various roles during these meetings, with detailed role cards guiding their preparation. The course included task-based learning, workshops, debates, and multimedia presentations to practice both their DO skills and language. Google Classroom provided access to instructional videos, tutorials, and feedback, while scaffolding techniques and collaborative learning were used to break down complex tasks and enhance understanding. The curriculum was structured around a series of progressive speech projects, starting from simple tasks and advancing to more complex ones. Students received continuous feedback from peers and instructors, engaged in self and peer assessment, and participated in peer mentoring.

Study II: Discussion

Our research complemented self-report data with expert assessments of PS competence, addressing the need for a comprehensive evaluation as suggested by Broeckelman-Post and Pyle (2017). Expert post-intervention evaluations indicated significant improvements in subjects' PS competence for both Recorded (T1) and Live (T2) PS performance, supporting Clark and Jones's (2001) research, where participants delivered speeches to audiences of 10 people. Our *Live PS Performances* involved audiences of over 18 people, providing a suitable context for evaluation.

The majority of the students displayed positive progress trends, predominantly a sequential improvement ($T0 < T1 < T2$), indicating the effectiveness of the EDO course in fostering sustained PS skill improvement. However, a minority exhibited negative patterns, suggesting areas where the course might be less effective or where additional support might be needed. EDO participants received slightly higher expert scores for their *Live PS Performance*, likely due to the rehearsals conducted for the *Recorded PS performance*. Menzel and Carrell (1994) demonstrated a strong correlation between the quality of speech performance and various factors, including cumulative GPA, total preparation time, visual aid preparation, number of audience rehearsals, silent rehearsals, rehearsing out loud, external research, and speaking note preparation. EDO students' self-reported assessments showed that more speech recordings positively influenced PS performance evaluations at T1 and T2, with higher scores correlating to increased practice, which further underscores the importance of practice. Contrary to initial expectations, participants felt more prepared for *Live PS performance* at T2 than for *Recorded PS performance* at T1. One possible reason is the increased preparation time students had for the *Live PS performance* at T2, which allowed them to practice and refine their PS skills, leading to enhanced confidence and perceived competence.

Higher *Recorded PS Performance* at T1 significantly predicted self-reported PSA at T1, which in turn significantly predicted both self-reported PSA at T2 and *Live PS Performance* at T2. This suggests that students' initial self-evaluations and perceptions of their performance influence their future performance and self-assessments. This finding aligns with the research by Al-Tamimi (2014), which emphasizes the role of PS instruction in improving English-speaking competence and reducing communication apprehension, as well as with Dellah et al. (2020), who proved the positive correlation between managing anxiety and positive self-assessments in PS in EFL contexts. Furthermore, it corroborates with the work of Hunter et al. (2014), who found that courses aimed at reducing PS anxiety significantly improve students' self-perceived competence.

There were no significant differences based on gender at any measurement point, which is consistent with prior research indicating the uniform effectiveness of PS training across genders when standardized methods are used (M. Allen et al., 1989b). Prior PS experience boosted performance at subsequent stages, as significant differences were observed at T1 and T2 but not at Baseline. The lack of significant differences at Baseline (T0) can be attributed to the initial equal footing of all students, regardless of prior experience, who were assessed without recent practice. The transition from face-to-face to online PS likely leveled the initial situation, but as students adapted, those with prior PS experience were better able to transfer their skills to the online format and demonstrated improved integration of feedback and application of techniques learned during the EDO course. This suggests that prior PS experience provides a foundational advantage effectively heightened by the EDO course, leading to more pronounced improvements at subsequent stages.

Content scores consistently outperformed *delivery* at all stages, results which are comparable to Clark and Jones (2001), who found quite similar *delivery* and *content* skills post-intervention. Gehrke (2016a) and Keith (2016) advised integrating speech structure and delivery skills in PS training. While the EDO course improved *delivery*, it may not have sufficiently emphasized these elements to surpass *content* performance, a disparity which may be attributed to students' greater familiarity and confidence with *content* creation. Therefore, extended and more focused practice on *delivery* is needed to achieve significant improvements.

There was a marked increase in participants' outcomes, as demonstrated by their self-perceived PS competence following the EDO course. These findings align with the limited studies available on online PS courses. (Broeckelman-Post & Pyle, 2017; Clark & Jones, 2001). However, our results are contradicted by those of Westwick et al. (2015, 2016), who found that online PS courses do not increase students' self-perceived communication competence as measured by McCroskey's (1988) Self-perceived Communication Competence Scale (SPCC). On the one hand, this discrepancy may be due to the differences in what is measured: while Westwick et al. focus on overall communication competence, our study specifically targeted PS competence. We also contend that a fair comparison cannot be made between traditional PS courses and their online counterpart because of the distinct nature of the skill involved – DO, i.e., communicating to online audiences, and PS, i.e., communicating to f-t-f audiences. On the other hand, studies that showed insignificant improvements in subjects' PS competence following enrolment in an online PS course lacked a real audience. A mere three individuals do not really stand for an audience, which is essential in PS. Therefore, comparing f-t-f *delivery* to a recorded speech presented to a small group or no audience is not enough for a valid comparison.

At T1, students with prior PS experience performed better in both *content* and *delivery*. At T2, significant differences were found for *content* but not for *delivery*. These results show that prior PS experience consistently enhances *content* performance, aligning with Clark and Jones (2001) and Gehrke's (2016a) research findings. To improve *delivery*, more targeted practice and focused training are essential. Johnson's study (2012) on university students proved that participants who had taken a high school speech course or got involved in extracurricular PS activities experienced significantly lower levels of PSA, which proves the beneficial impact of early PS education on subsequent performance. Given these findings, we can conclude that prior PS experience similarly benefits high school students, suggesting that early exposure to PS education can effectively reduce anxiety and enhance performance at both secondary and higher education levels.

Students with B1 speaking proficiency scored significantly lower than those with B2 and C1 levels for *Baseline*, *Recorded*, and *Live PS Performance*, and English proficiency influenced the relationship between *Baseline* and *Live PS performance*. The observed differences in PS performance between B1-level students and those with higher proficiency (B2 and C1) may be due to the greater linguistic and cognitive resources available to the latter, enabling them to organize and express their thoughts more effectively since they can access advanced language structures and vocabulary, which enhances their overall communication skills. The lack of significant differences between B2 and C1 students suggests that, beyond a certain proficiency level, factors such as *delivery* techniques and confidence become more relevant in determining PS success. English proficiency increases the positive impact of the intervention, emphasizing the importance of targeted language support in PS training to help lower-proficiency students improve their performance.

Our findings indicate that a minimum B1 language level is essential for students to effectively participate in an EDO course, while a B2 level or higher is an advantage for optimal outcomes in EDO courses tailored for EFL students. These findings align with Faisal's (2015) research, which showed that proficiency in specific language skills correlates with self-efficacy and self-awareness. DO training is appropriate to be done in English since the revolutionary speech forms at the core of the 'New Oratory' (Rossette-Crake, 2019, pp. 269–270) originate from English-speaking countries and embody the essence of Anglo-Saxon communication culture, promoting an individualistic, personal, and visually captivating style of address. Remarkably, they are being embraced globally, occasionally in local languages but predominantly in English (Rossette-Crake, 2020a, p. 3). As emphasized by Li et al. (2015), EFL teaching should focus on language skills and place students in self-motivated speaking situations.

Analysis of the data showed a notable rise in *self-esteem* scores from Baseline (T0) to post-intervention (T1). Higher initial PS performance was a significant predictor of increased self-esteem at T1, while higher self-esteem at T1 significantly influenced *Recorded PS Performance* at T1 and *Live PS Performance* at T2. Thus, self-esteem partially mediated the relationship between Baseline and subsequent PS performances, which suggests that the EDO course significantly enhanced self-esteem, which in turn boosted PS performance. Previous studies have documented the positive impact of educational interventions on self-esteem and related performance improvements. Johnson's (2012) research demonstrated that prior PS instruction significantly reduced PSA in college students, underscoring the importance of early PS education in reducing anxiety and enhancing performance. Similarly, Tripudiyana et al. (2022) found a significant positive connection between *self-esteem* and speaking skills in eleventh-grade students, with higher *self-esteem* associated with better speaking performance. Morreale (1995) also demonstrated that a basic PS course significantly improved both self-esteem and communication competence among college students. Notably, both Morreale et al's (1995) study and our EDO course used the Rosenberg scale to evaluate *self-esteem*, allowing a direct comparison of findings. Morreale et al. found significant improvements in self-esteem, with mean scores increasing from 32.05 to 34.26, closely paralleling our results where self-esteem scores rose from 18.42 to 21.40. These similarities evidence the effectiveness of structured PS courses in enhancing *self-esteem*, emphasizing the importance of psychological factors in communication, regardless of the specific instructional context.

We identified no significant changes in *self-esteem* scores between male and female participants at either T0 or T1, which means that gender does not influence self-esteem levels among participants, suggesting that the course's impact on self-esteem is consistent across genders. The findings align with Morreale et al. (1995) and Johnson's (2012) research, where gender did not significantly moderate the effects on PS anxiety or self-esteem. This consistency across studies reinforces the idea that gender has no influence on either heightening self-esteem or reducing PS anxiety through structured PS interventions. Thus, we infer that improvements in self-esteem are due to the structured course rather than inherent gender differences.

The discovery that EDO boosts *self-esteem* yet negatively impacts *PS performance* is intriguing and contrasts with prior research, which typically associates higher self-esteem with improved outcomes. One speculation for this unexpected result is that students with high self-esteem might exhibit overconfidence, leading to less preparation and effort in improving their PS skills. Baumeister et al. (2003) highlight how high *self-esteem*, often correlated with positive outcomes in various performance contexts, can also result in complacency and reduced effort,

ultimately negatively affecting performance. They argue that *self-esteem* alone is insufficient for optimal performance and must be coupled with conscientiousness and a willingness to engage in deliberate practice and effortful preparation.

Our hypothesis that higher *self-esteem* levels would lead to better self-assessment scores in PS performance, was not supported, indicating that *self-esteem* alone does not significantly influence self-assessment in PS contexts. This contradicts the findings of Elfering and Grebner (2012, pp. 109–110), who viewed *self-esteem* as a stress buffer in PS. However, the cited study targeted traditional PS competence, and in it, *self-esteem* was correlated with other factors, which we are missing in our EDO evaluation. According to these scholars (Elfering & Grebner, 2012), individuals with high self-esteem tend to experience fewer distracting thoughts during PS tasks and remain more focused. Conversely, those with low *self-esteem*, feeling threatened by the task, are more prone to distractions as they blame themselves for mistakes instead of external factors and may also make broad generalizations about their mistakes. This contrasts with Tripudiyana's (2022) conclusions, which showed a strong connection between high *self-esteem* and good speaking skills, showing that *self-esteem* predicts success in speaking.

Although studies like Rosenfeld et al. (1995) suggest that gifted students possess certain advantages, such as higher self-perceived communication competence (SPCC), lower communication apprehension (CA), and enriched educational experiences, which can facilitate the acquisition of PS skills, they do not offer empirical data or detailed analysis on whether gifted and talented students acquire PS skills more effectively than their peers. EDO addresses this gap by comparing skill acquisition in students with normal IQ levels against gifted and talented students. Our research results underscore the role intelligence plays in enhancing PS performance and confirm the efficacy of structured PS interventions across different intelligence levels.

Differences in individual learning styles and adaptability to the EDO intervention could explain students' varied outcomes according to *intelligence* level. Some students might thrive with structured PS interventions, while others may find them overwhelming or misaligned with their personal learning preferences. EDO pedagogy could also play a significant role in how effectively students translate initial skills into improved performance. These findings corroborate with existing literature emphasizing the role of cognitive abilities and educational attitudes in effective communication (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Another speculation is that delving deeper into the specifics of what and how students are expected to demonstrate their PS skills might heighten anxiety and have a negative effect on their performance. Understanding the complexities and demands of effective PS more deeply could increase the pressure to excel, which might result in decreased performance even for individuals who were initially competent.

Research has shown that increased awareness of PS complexities can lead to increased anxiety, which negatively impacts performance (Bippus & Daly, 1999). Hence, high self-expectations and the pressure to perform well can exacerbate PS anxiety.

Cohen (1935) and Kamarulzaman et al. (2013) emphasized the role of cognitive skills in effective communication. EDO participants with *higher or superior intelligence* levels consistently performed better than those with *average intelligence* in both *Recorded* and *Live PS Performances* for *speech content*. Specifically, higher intelligence students demonstrated superior ability in organizing and presenting *content* effectively, reflected in their higher scores. Nevertheless, no significant differences were detected for *delivery*, suggesting that while intelligence enhances *content* quality, it does not necessarily translate to superior *delivery* skills. These results indicate that intelligence influences the *content* quality of PS performances more than *delivery*. Cohen's (1935) study involved a specially designed English curriculum for gifted students, emphasizing enrichment and creative literary expression, which, while not specifically measuring PS skills, is a comprehensive approach to developing communication abilities.

Attitude toward school proved a significantly positive predictor of *Baseline PS performance*, while *self-esteem* was a significantly negative predictor. *Intelligence*, however, did not show a significant predictive value, which means that while students with a positive attitude toward school performed well initially in PS, those with high self-esteem paradoxically performed worse, possibly due to overconfidence. The predictive model was not statistically significant for *Recorded PS Performance (T1)* or *Live PS Performance (T2)*, highlighting the nuanced nature of predictors. This lack of significance may be due to several factors. One possibility is that the EDO intervention itself introduced new variables that influenced students' performances in ways not captured by the initial baseline measures.

Attitude toward school significantly predicted both *T1 and T2 PS Performance*, suggesting that students with a positive outlook on their educational environment are more likely to gain advantages from the EDO intervention and enhance their PS skills. Students' *attitude toward school* significantly influenced their ability to progress, which means that they are more motivated and receptive to the intervention, resulting in better PS outcomes. Similarly, the study by Amalya and Ma'rifatulloh (2022) found a positive correlation between undergraduate students' motivation and their proficiency in speaking in English, with higher motivation leading to better speaking skills. Students with higher intelligence levels and greater English-speaking competence consistently had better self-assessment scores for PS performance at both T1 and T2. Additionally, those without prior PS experience scored higher at T1, possibly due to

overconfidence, but there was no significant difference at T2, underscoring the key role language skills play in self-perceived performance, a finding also supported by our experts' evaluation.

Conclusions to Study II

This research validates the quality of the EDO course, advocates for adapting traditional PS education to meet modern technological demands, and paves the way for further research to optimize and expand EDO methodologies. Subjects' learning outcomes demonstrated that the EDO course effectively prepares students for synchronous and asynchronous online presentations. However, proceeding cautiously, we must consider the implications of synchronous and asynchronous audiences, which are typical of the online setting. We concur with Matt McGarrity's viewpoint (2021) that we can implement efficient online PS courses without a live audience, focusing instead on skill development, which means that recorded speeches should be regarded as a valuable component, as is the case of our EDO training. Another point of agreement is that in-class audiences may not always offer the desired level of energy and engagement with the speech act (McGarrity, 2021).

The EDO course boosted students' self-confidence and self-esteem and resulted in noteworthy progress in self-reported and expert-evaluated PS performance. These outcomes provide valuable insights into the question posed by PS scholars (Broeckelman-Post et al., 2019; Vanhorn et al., 2008; Ward, 2016) regarding the effectiveness of developing PS skills online. Additionally, our findings serve as a direct response to Westwick's (2015) question: 'Do online courses that involve larger audiences of people trained in public speaking result in greater improvements in students' self-perceived communication competence compared to courses with smaller, untrained audiences?' (p. 23) – The answer is a resounding yes, which reinforces the potential of online PS training.

Clark and Jones (2001) found no significant difference in communication apprehension and developed skills between traditional and online formats, supporting our conclusion that online instruction effectively develops PS skills for online communication. However, they noted higher retention rates in traditional formats, a challenge our EDO course addresses by integrating engaging digital tools to maintain student interest and reduce dropout rates. Similarly, Linardopoulos (2010) demonstrated that fully online PS courses can be as effective as traditional f-t-f courses by integrating video recordings and online discussion boards.

EDO employs a synchronous and asynchronous online model combining online and in-person sessions, effectively balancing flexibility and structured learning. This approach aligns with Morreale et al.'s (2019) recommendation to use a comprehensive framework in online PS

courses, drawing on Fink's Integrated Course Design model to enhance learning outcomes. Our study highlights a pivotal shift from traditional PS to DO, integrating EDO courses into secondary education. Boyce et al. (2007) emphasize that early practice in PS enhances proficiency and reduces anxiety in later life. Engaging high school students in a rigorous six-month program, we observed significant developments in their PS performance and self-esteem, particularly among those with higher English proficiency. Our outcomes emphasize the efficacy of structured DO instruction. As we progress into the digital age, the ability to communicate effectively through digital platforms becomes increasingly indispensable.

Study II: Limitations and Further Research

The participants in the experiment were exclusively Romanian high school students, which might limit the generalizability of the conclusions to other cultural and linguistic contexts. The study sample of only 100 participants, while sufficient for our analysis, may not provide the statistical power necessary to detect smaller effects or to confidently generalize the findings to larger populations. Thus, forthcoming research should replicate this experiment with more diverse and larger samples to further explore the impact of EDO training on PS competence within the EFL framework.

Another significant research limitation is the focus on high school students, whereas much of the cited research pertains to college students. This discrepancy arises due to the extremely limited research on high school students and even less on teaching DO/EDO. We acknowledge that the developmental differences between high school and college students may impact the generalizability of the findings, and the lack of prior research on EDO in EFL contexts restricts situating our results within broader academic discourse.

Given the experimental nature of the methodologies used and the positive outcomes observed, this study calls for further empirical research to refine EDO. Future studies should explore how to effectively integrate EDO into educational frameworks, ensuring students are well-prepared to meet the challenges of diverse communication environments. Moreover, another promising avenue could be the investigation of the effects of EDO instruction on students' PS and communication skills across various educational stages and career development.

Final Conclusions and Implications for EDO Instruction at the High School Level

Our research identified significant overlaps between DO and PS skills and mapped distinct characteristics of EDO, such as creativity, active listening, leadership, feedback skills, emotional intelligence, and technical skills. EDO involves redirecting focus from the speaker to the audience

and from scriptwriting to delivery. The expert-evaluated and self-reported results in PS performance and self-esteem validate the effectiveness of the EDO course in enhancing communication competencies in digital platforms for high school students. As such, we advocate for integrating comprehensive DO and EDO training into school programs to equip students with key skills for the digital age and meet contemporary educational demands. Designing DO programs with cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in mind will help cultivate effective communicators who are also empathetic and culturally aware.

This research contributes to the limited body of literature on EDO by empirically validating its efficacy in enhancing PS skills among EFL high school students. We have proven that higher English proficiency levels lead to better PS outcomes, suggesting the need for embedded language support within EDO courses to ensure that all students, regardless of their initial proficiency, can benefit from DO training. The study provides valuable insights into the instructional design and quality assurance factors essential for effective EDO training, including for gifted and talented individuals, highlighting the transformative potential of technology and audience-centered approaches. EDO education should focus on leveraging multimedia resources and interactive learning techniques to make the learning process engaging and effective.

EDO curriculum significantly improves EFL students' competencies, providing them with critical skills for digital communication landscapes and personal and professional success. By providing empirical proof of the effectiveness of EDO instruction, the study advocates for a pedagogical shift that embraces the nuances of DO. It fills a critical gap, demonstrating that DO training is as necessary as traditional PS instruction and advocates for a pedagogical shift towards EDO programs that leverage multimedia resources, interactive learning, and audience engagement to enhance communicative efficacy.

We offer a roadmap and practical solutions for educators, researchers, and policymakers to enhance digital communication skills among students, ensuring they are well-equipped to navigate the evolving landscape of modern communication. The findings advocate for further empirical research to optimize online PS instructional methodologies and explore innovative pedagogical strategies to meet the evolving demands of digital communication.

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