

***Developing Interviewing and Presentation Skills: Using Action Research
Methodology***

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Abstract

The goal of the study was to develop interviewing and presentation skills of the course participants, who were being prepared to get into the main stream program as entrants of Secondary Teacher Education Program (STEP). The training program was sponsored by a reputable Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), Institute of Ismaili Studies, London . Besides attending the workshops on the development of interviewing skills, the participants were also given workshops on how to prepare power point presentations which reflected on their learning journey as part of the development of the presentation skills. Mock interviews based on their respective personal statement was designed by the facilitator. The data collection method was done by following the strategy of 'Individual Teacher Action Research', by adapting different models of action research which will be discussed in the sections of; Literature Review and Methodology . From the findings of the study, it has been revealed that the facilitator should have prepared a manual of course objectives and shared with the participants for future interventions. It has also been identified that the addition of the objectives on stress management and the dress code could be added to the manual of the objectives. Sometimes, it was difficult to reach the course participants; due to different time zones, poor internet connections and the availability of course participants. With the efforts of sponsors, course participants and the resource person, the above-mentioned problems were resolved.

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INTRODUCTION

The different four phases of Individual Teacher Action Research are elicited below in Figure 1. A Reflective Practice of Action research was adapted, during the development of course objectives and classroom teaching.

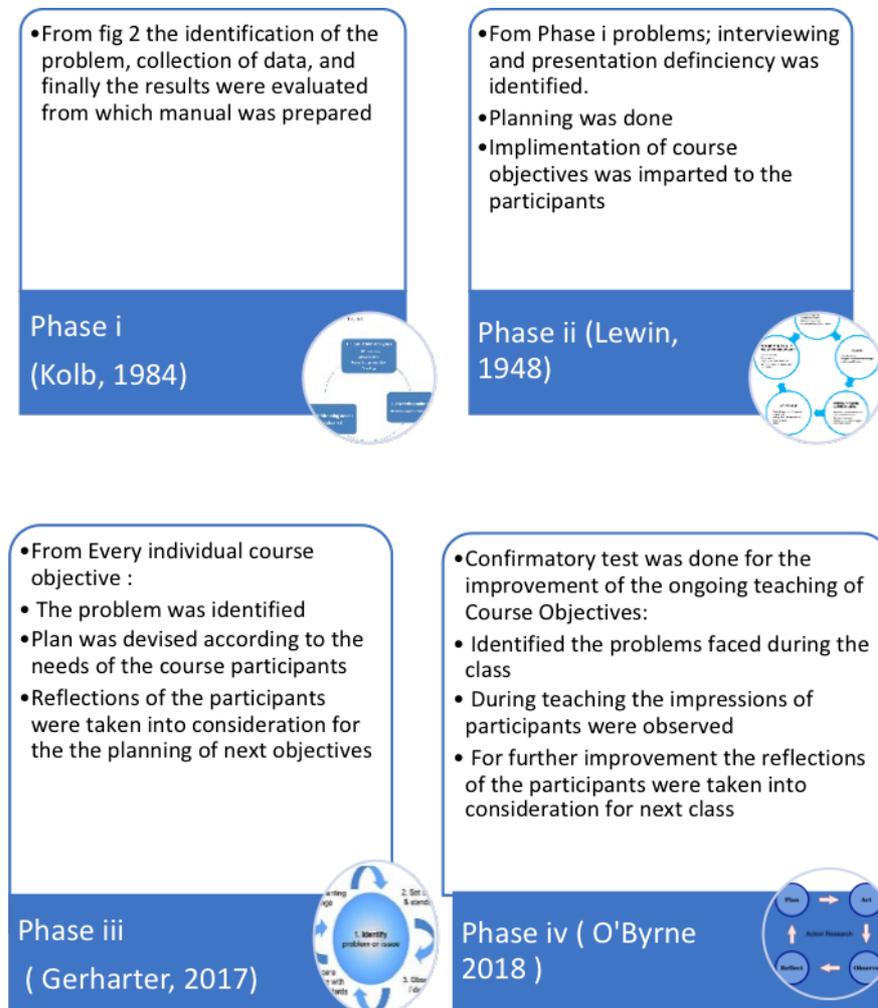


Figure-1 - Four Phases of Study

The focus of the study was to assess the skills and knowledge of the participants in the areas of their interviewing and presentation skills. The main objectives of the workshop were to develop confidence and enthusiasm among the course participants, while appearing for the formal and final interviews.

In addition, the other aspect explored during the study was the input given to the participants on how to be a good presenters while making oral presentations. The presentations were based on the teaching and learning experience termed as ‘ Learning Journey’, which was mostly shared through power point presentations. In addition, the course participants were prepared on how to answer the questions which were designed from their respective personal statements.

The individual teacher action research was most suitable for the researcher, because the researcher was working with participants who resided in different places, and had different historical background.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The basic steps in formulating action research during the study was initially conceptualized by adapting the Action Research model (Figure 2).

The model explains that firstly, the aspect which a researcher wants to investigate has to be identified, and then the data to be investigated is collected. The data is then organized and interpreted and a solution is identified. After identifying the solution, the researcher tries to implement it and monitors the outcomes by evaluating the results. (Kolb, 1984)

During Phase 1 , the model in Figure 2 was adapted in the following manner: The facilitator identified the problem, which was the lack of knowledge in the development of interviewing and presentation skills. Then the data was collected based on the existing knowledge of the course participants. The objectives were then prepared and a manual of course objectives was designed and finally the results were evaluated.

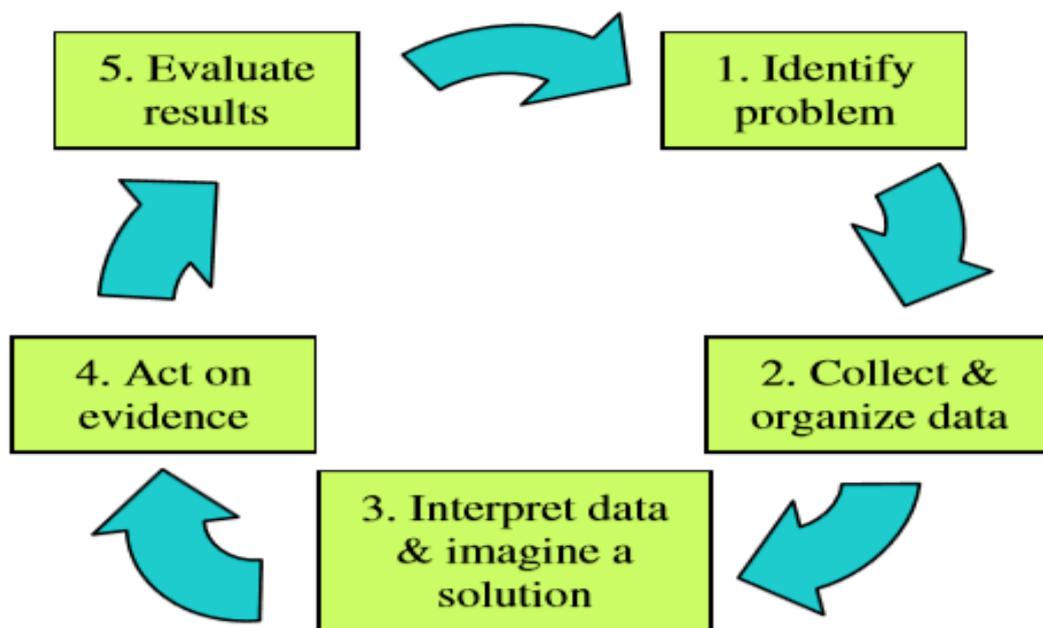


Figure 2 Phase i

Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and situations in which the practices are carried out .

The discussion of action research in the study is self reflective because it is the Individual Teacher Action Research, which tends to generate research towards the enhancement of interviewing and presentation skills of the research participants.

A definition of research is, “the systemic collection of information that is designed to bring about social change”

The research objectives of the study were designed to bring about social changes among the study participants in the development of their interviewing and presentation skills which would in turn support the participants to bring about social changes in the society.

The origin of action research was established by Kurt Lewin, his approach of Action Research is a research in which the researcher intervenes in and during the research. This serves two purposes: firstly according to Kurt Lewin, it will bring about positive change and secondly knowledge and theory will be generated. (Veliet, 2013)

Keeping in view Lewins’ model of action research mentioned above, the researcher kept the various forms of social environment which were affecting the linguistic background of the course participants. Thus, the course objectives were designed and developed according to the language proficiency of the course participants.

Action research is an effective tool in improving the quality of an organization. It is done through collecting data, diagnosing problems, searching for solutions, taking action on developed solutions, monitoring how well the action worked .

Looking into Doyles’ statement of action research, the research under discussion followed the same diagnostic process as stated by Doyle. During the study, data was collected on the proficiency levels of the course participants. In this manner the problem language proficiency was identified, and the course objectives were prepared. After the implementation of every objective the evaluation was done, for further improvement.

It is also important to understand that effective presentation skills are not solely for the fortunate few who are naturally good communicators but that effective presentation skills can be developed in anyone and that we will have the ability to learn how to become highly effective presenters “Effective Presentation”, (2009, June 8)

Considering the review on Effective Presentation mentioned above, the course objectives of presentation skills were designed in the following manner: a) establish self esteem/integrity during the interview b) communicate clearly to the interviewer c) persuade or/ and influence the interviewer d) create a clear message during an interview e) deliver the message in an effective manner f) engage the interviewer g) have one key message throughout the interview, and h) start with a strong opening and ending

Candidates taken during job interviews that make them stand out; These actions can include proper interview behaviour, controlling nervousness or asking intelligent questions. If you have interviewing skills developed, and you ask intelligent questions, you will receive more job offers than those without them. (Interviewing Skills, 2018)

Interviewing skills are actions candidates take during job interviews that make them stand out.

Keeping in view the above mentioned objectives regarding the development of interviewing skills, the course objectives were prepared in such a manner that during the implementation of the course in class, the participants were made aware of how to control nervousness, what postures of sitting to use while being interviewed, and how to ask pertinent questions.

The skills were developed in such a manner that there was an exchange of ideas through a series of mock interviews based on the participants' learning journey and their personal statements.

STUDY DESIGN

The principle outcomes of a research project; what the project suggested, revealed or indicated. This usually refers to the totality of outcomes, rather than the conclusions or recommendations from them. Findings (n.d.)

The design of the Action Research in the paper is based on the following:

- a) Purpose of the study will be to evaluate the Interviewing and Presentation skills of the participants
- b) The benefits of the individual teacher action research will assist the participants to develop their Interviewing and Presentation Skills

The procedure of the research is illustrated in Table I, which helped the researcher to plan the course objectives and lesson plans.

TABLE 1

Who?	Conducted the study on Course Participants
Where?	In the residents/workplace of the participants
How?	Qualitative method, which were adopted; power point presentations, handouts & discussion with the resource person
Why?	To make the participants proficient enough and to appear for their final interviews, and presentations on their respective learning journey

METHODOLOGY

An application development methodology says what the phases are and what activities should be undertaken in each phase. (Turbit, 2018)

Three key objectives for the study were:

- a) To assess the knowledge and skills of the subjects, regarding the development of their Interviewing and Presentation Skills.
- b) To enhance the confidence and enthusiasm in the subjects.
- c) To provide hands on experience in the intended skills and knowledge

A program management methodology says a project should be broken down into phases and there should be a plan in place before each phase begins. (Turbit, 2018)

Based on a spiral of steps designed by Lewin (Figure 3) in Phase 2, the facilitator adapted the cycle and then identified the problem, which was a lack of interviewing and presentations skills and then a fact was discovered, that since they were from different historical backgrounds and had different living experiences, their interviewing and presentation skills needed further improvement. Therefore, the plan followed the following steps:

- a) Implementation of the plan
- b) Evaluation of outcomes
- c) Amendments of the teaching strategies
- d) Finally, the amended objectives were incorporated as a next step of teaching

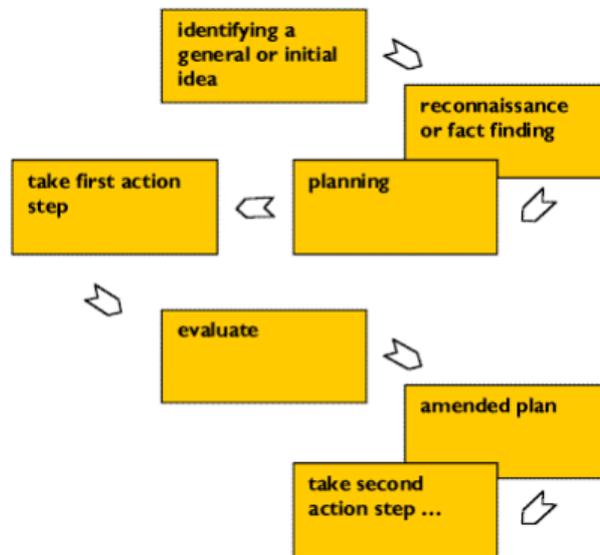


Figure 3 Phase ii

During Phase 3 for every course objective, the problem was identified, a plan was devised and action was taken to implement the plan. During the planning of the next lesson, the reflections were taken into consideration.

During the implementation of the plan the observations were recorded by collecting and analyzing the data and finally the reflections were taken into consideration for the next objective. For every teaching objective a vicious cycle was adapted from the model of action research elicited in Figure 4, which is Phase iii.



Figure 4 Phase iii

The approach listed above, was used to highlight and resolve the problems of the participants, by assessing and improving their interviewing and presentation skills. The overview of the study is the current evaluation of the study, which reports on 36 student-teacher contact hours, of classroom teaching. The workshops were designed to improve the interviewing and presentation skills of the research participants. The central objectives of these workshops were to enhance the confidence and enthusiasm of the subjects. In addition, the focus of the study was to investigate the knowledge of interviewing and presentation skills of the subjects. The objectives of the study were developed in such a manner that the subjects were encouraged to practice the skills of interviewing and presentation.

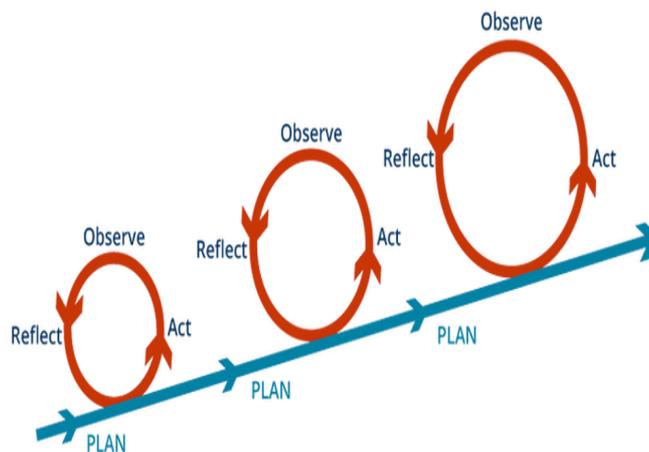


Figure 5 Phase iv

The Cycle of the study during the designing and implementation of course objectives is elicited in Phase iv (Figure 5), which was done in the following manner: The plan was developed, implemented, reflected upon and was finally observed. The overall effect of the course was based on the Model of Action Research: Four Steps to Conduct Action Research by W. Ian O' Byrne depicted in Figure 5. The model is based on the following: a) Identifying the problem b) Collecting the data c) Analyzing and interpreting the data d) Taking action e) Continuing the action research cycle.

The overall aspect of designing, implementing, and evaluating was adapted from the models of action research, elicited in Figures 2, 3, 4 & 5.

The subjects were given two hours per session. The sessions were an average of three classes per week. Therefore, the total number of hours given were approximately 36. In addition, the learners were also facilitated, in the form of mock interviews, to prepare them for the participation in the formal final interviews. The objectives of mock interviews were based on their personal statements. In addition, the slide show presentation on the learning journey was shared with the facilitator. Finally, the participants presented the slide show for the feedback from the facilitator, which was followed by the final presentation, as a graded assignment.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

Implementation Research is the study of these efforts with set of basic question: What are we doing? Is it working? For whom? Where? When? How? And Why? In other words, implementation research is an endeavour to understand if and how educational efforts are accomplishing their goals. (Century & Cassata, A., 2016)

The implementation of Individual Teacher Action Research is based on the development of interviewing and presentation skills of the course participants in order to gain admission in STEP. The implementation of the research followed the models are illustrated in figures: 2, 3, 4 & 5

The Cycle of implementation was defined in the following manner:

- A. Identified the objective to be studied: The sponsoring agency and the supervisors of the respective areas, focused on further development of the interviewing and presentation skills of the research participants.
- B. Collected data on the problem: The resource person interacted with the identified candidates. During the process of interaction, it was revealed that they needed workshops on the development of interviewing and presentation skills.
- C. Developed a plan to address the problem: The resource person developed the course objectives (Appendix A) and the details of the objectives in the form of lesson plans.
- D. Implemented the plan: The developed lesson plans were imparted to the learners two times a week with a duration of 3 hrs.
- E. Mock interviews: The facilitator assisted the learners on how to appear in formal interviews based on their respective personal statements.
- F. Slide show presentation: The facilitator guided the participants of the study for the presentation of slide show on their respective Learning Journey

FINDINGS

During the study throughout it was an individual action research which was carried in a logical sequence to improve the interviewing and presentation skills of course participants.

Therefore the finding section is very important because the result is data generated which would help the organizers and facilitator for future planning.

The details of data collection methods is illicited in Figure 1, following the models of; Phase i Kolb, 1984, Phase ii Lewin, 1948, Phase iii Garharter 2017 and Phase iv O' Byrne 2018.

The following points were highlighted, while researching the findings of the study:

- 1) The problem regarding the scheduling of the classes was rectified with the cooperation of the sponsors of the course and high moral of the participants. In this manner the facilitator was able to schedule the classes according to the respective time zones and work schedules, successfully.
- 2) The Course Objectives (see Appendix A) were designed in such a manner that the content was based on the requirement of the formal interviews. After completing the cycle of action during the sessions, it was revealed that the language of some objectives could have been designed with simple language exponents, considering the language proficiency of the recipients. Therefore, it is recommended that in future, while planning a modified course on interviewing and presentation skills, the language should be according to the level of proficiency of the study participants.
- 3) To articulate the ideas regarding the course objectives well during a formal final interview, it was found that it is essential that a manual of overall objectives be shared among the interviewees. This would assist the participants to review the course objectives for the final interviews, confidently.
- 4) In the course objectives two components should have been added, a) Stress management, and b) Dress code. The added objectives would give enthusiasm and confidence among the interviewees during the formal interviews.
- 5) The resource person, instead of giving respective handouts for the commencement of each objective, could have prepared a manual containing the overall course objectives
- 6) When heading towards the conclusion of the course objectives, the facilitator should have at least two sessions with all the study participants as a group, regarding pros and cons of the course objectives. This strategy would not only elevate participants' moral and confidence, but it would also increase the knowledge level of the course participants. In addition, this strategy would also assist the facilitator to bring about required changes for future interventions of the workshops.
- 7) Positive Feedback from the course participants:
 - i) Gained confidence
 - ii) Had clear idea of open ended, close ended questions
 - iii) Understood the knowledge of hypothetical situation
 - iv) Mock interviews assisted the participants to identify their strengths and weaknesses
 - v) Flexibility in the start and end time of the sessions
 - vi) Development of self confidence
 - vii) Skype sessions while discussing the respective objectives gave a clear image during the discussions
- 8) Suggestions for the improvements:
 - i) The objectives of the course could have been shared with the course participants in the form of a booklet
 - ii) Students voiced out that in course objectives, the questions should have been

- designed from simple to complex
- iii) The objectives regarding dress code for the final interviews could be added for future interventions. This would raise the moral of the interviewees
 - iv) The objectives for stress management was highly recommended by the course participants

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. At times it was difficult for the resource person to get in contact with the participants due to different time zones and because they were in- service participants.
2. Absence of compiled manual of Course Objectives; Interviewing Skills, Power Point Presentations, and Personal Statements, slackened the pace of the workshops.
3. The compilation of manual containing Course Objectives and Teaching Material, could have been designed as a separate entity. This strategy of planning which presented the Course Objectives and Teaching Material, could have been planned in a formalized manner.
4. Since the given time of 36 hours was very little to cover the Course Objectives, it is recommended that the student – teacher contact hours should be increased for future interventions.
5. The sponsoring agency should have shared ESL and EFL scores with the resource person. This strategy would have made it easy for the facilitator to plan the objectives and teaching material accordingly.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of Individual Teacher Action research under discussion has reached to a point where a variety of perspectives of action research were used to generate results by using different models, of action research depicted in figures 2,3, 4 & 5.

Throughout the Individual Teacher Action Research, in the paper it is depicted; for every action of implementation, research was done before implementing the research models.

The objective of the study was to enhance the confidence and enthusiasm among the course participants who were opting to get admission into the STEP Program. In order to upgrade EFL/ESL therefore, the sponsoring agency of a reputable organization prepared the participants for further development of their language skills. Therefore, the study participants were prepared to appear for IELTS (Course of British Council).

After completing successfully, the above-mentioned components of English Language, the participants attended the workshops on interviewing and presentation skills of the course participants; therefore, she developed the Course Objectives based on the components of interviewing and presentation skills (see Appendix A). The course of 36 hours, was not sufficient. Therefore, the sponsoring agency should assigned more than 36 hours. In addition, the strategy of Mock Interviews based on the personal statement, were developed and implemented to raise the moral and confidence of the participants, when appearing for the formal interviews. Besides the

training for the formal interviews, the researcher prepared questions for the participants, based on their respective Personal Statement which assisted them to answer the questions, when appearing for the formal interviews (see Appendix B). Development of a slide show on the Learning Journey, was graded because here the examiners had to observe the confidence level of the course participants. The preparation of the slide show on learning journey, was also assisted by the facilitator. Therefore, the action regarding the total student- teacher- hours after researching in the form of participants feedback elicited that 36 hours were not enough for the workshops, due to several reasons; a) time zone b) language proficiency, and c) in service. Therefore, it is suggested that for future planning of the interviewing and presentation workshops hours should be increased.

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Appendix A

Course Outline & Course Objectives

Course Title: Development of Interviewing/Presentation Skills

Entry Level: Achieving IELTS level between 6.5 to 8

Credit Hours: 36

Details Of Course Objectives

SKILLS	SUB-SKILLS
Interpersonal Skills	Verbal-Non -verbal Communication, Listening, Questioning, Manners, Problem Solving Social Awareness, Self-Management, Responsibility, Accountability & Assertiveness
How to express yourself with confidence in an interview	Eye contact, Modulate the voice, Attire, Boldness, Pausing during the conversation
Three ways to depict Motivation/Enthusiasm	Relaxation of nerves, stay positive, Volunteer the enthusiasm
Types of Interviews	Competency based Interviews and Traditional Interviews
How to handle Questions	Close ended/open ended/ hypothetical Questions
Samples of Interview Questions	Resume Based/ Traditional Questions: Breaking the ice, Interest & Motivation, Education, Strength & Development Areas, Work Situation & Behavioural
Questions to be asked from the interviewees	What it takes to be successful in the program? How will the duties change once the training Program is completed? What are the opportunities for the advancement of the Program?

Appendix B

The following are few questions which were taken from the Personal Statement / Resume based / Traditional Questions of the course participants:

Questions based on Personal Statement:

- Why do you think that this Program is a good fit for you?
- What major challenges are faced by the students in present day world and how would you assist them to overcome the problem?
- How would your goal to become a proficient teacher?
- Why do you think that teaching is a lasting contribution in a society?
- Do you think that you will enjoy studying in the Program which you have applied for?

Resume Based/ Traditional Questions:

- Can you introduce yourself?
- Do you think you would be able to enjoy studying in this Program?
- How did you become interested in this Program?
- What do you mean by pluralism and tolerance value?
- Which course have you enjoyed the most?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- How will you achieve your goals to be a proficient teacher?

Questions based on Interest/ Motivation:

- What have you accomplished that you are proud of?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses ?
- What have you accomplished or you are proud of?
- What do you mean by critical thinking and how are you going to develop this in your study?