



Special Olympics NC Global Messenger Training

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Background

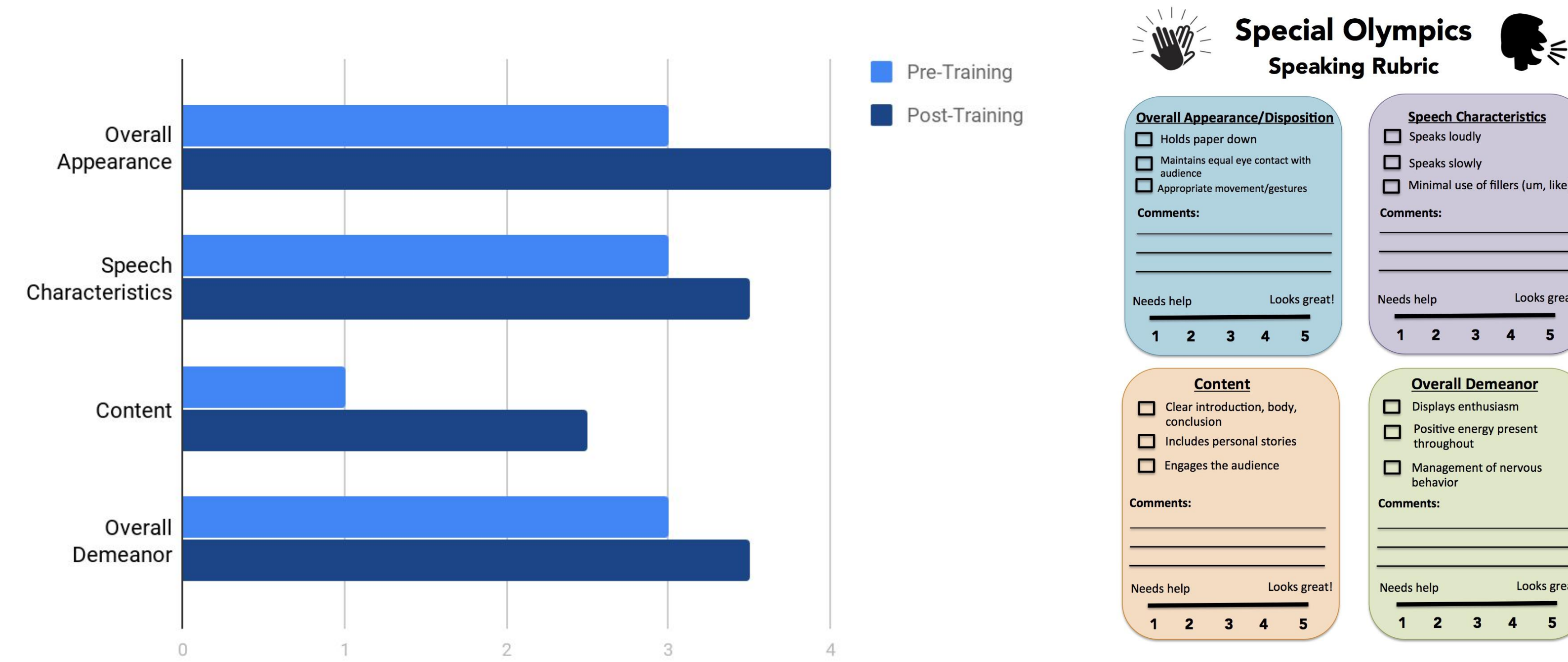
Since 1968, Special Olympics has provided individuals with intellectual disabilities opportunities to develop independence, confidence, and social skills. Athlete leadership programs, like Global Messengers, allow Special Olympics athletes to take on meaningful leadership roles in the movement. Global Messengers are Special Olympics athletes who speak on behalf of the program to recruit and thank fellow athletes, volunteers, and sponsors. The speeches given by these athletes play a vital role in furthering the mission of the organization by encouraging others to join the movement. This study explored the effectiveness of public speaking training program in improving personal confidence and public speaking skills for six Global Messengers serving the state of North Carolina. These skills were assessed across four domains including overall appearance, speech characteristics, content, and overall demeanor. The Global Messengers were also given the opportunity to rate their confidence and comfortability in regards to their public speaking skills both before and after the training. The Global Messengers were given the opportunity to learn and practice skills from the process of drafting a speech up until giving the presentation.

Methods

Representatives from Special Olympics North Carolina chose six Global Messenger athletes to participate in this research study. In the first training session, each of the participants were given a verbal pre-survey that inquired about their level of comfort with certain aspects of public speaking (ex. speaking to a large audience, drafting a speech, etc.) as well as a grading of their performance with certain skills (ex. speaking at appropriate volume, speed, etc.). The participants were then asked to give a pre-prepared speech in less than two minutes and the speeches were recorded for later viewing. The researchers evaluated the participant's speeches using a skills rubric with a rating scale of 1 to 5 in four different domains: overall appearance, speech characteristics, content, and overall demeanor. In the next three sessions, the participants were given specific instruction on how to reduce nervous behaviors, draft a speech, and to put all the skills together to create a strong presentation. In the final session, the participants gave a 2 minute speech that was again recorded for later viewing. The same instructors that completed the skills rubric for the first speech also completed an additional skills rubric for this speech. Finally, a post survey containing the same questions regarding comfort level and perceived performance was administered verbally to identify any improvements. The data from the skills rubrics and surveys from the pre-training session and post-training session was analyzed to determine statistical significance.

Results

Scores were obtained from pre-training and post-training speeches using the speaking rubric. Positive growth and improvement was reflected when comparing these rubrics across all athletes. Overall average scores on the speaking rubrics increased 15% from the pre-training speeches to the post-training speeches. Analyzing the individual domains scored, 67% of athletes received equal or higher scores for all domains of the post-training speeches. All participants improved their post-training scores in at least one of the domains. The improvements for each domain are as follows in comparing the lowest score on the pre-training speeches with the lowest score of the post-training speeches: overall appearance improved from 3 to 4, speech characteristics: 3 to 3.5, content: 1 to 2.5, and overall demeanor: 3 to 3.5. In summary, positive growth is shown across all domains after athletes participated in the training program. Please to refer to chart below for a visual representation of this data.



Scores submitted on the pre-training and post-training survey questions were also analyzed to determine how the training sessions influenced the athlete's comfort level and perceived public speaking skills. This provided the opportunity for the researchers to include the perceptions of participants in the study results. Surveys consisted of fifteen questions which were read aloud for athletes to self score. An overall 13% increase was reflected in the scores from the pre-training and post-training surveys. Further, one-third of participants reported equal or higher scores across all fifteen questions in the post-training survey.

Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to determine the effectiveness of a training program on improving the public speaking skills of Special Olympics athletes serving as Global Messengers. Overall, there was a positive trend in scores for both the skills and the participants ratings of comfortability and perceived performance. The participants provided positive feedback about the experience and how they believed it was beneficial. The strengths of this study include the diversity among the sample of participants. Athletes in the study represented a variety of the population in terms of age, gender, race, and severity of intellectual disability. However, this was limited to a small sample size of six participants. While improvements in public speaking skills were observed, it is suggested that a more intensive program could produce greater results.

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