

Action Research: Oral Presentation in EFL Classroom

アクションリサーチ：ELFクラスでの口頭プレゼンテーション

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Abstract

This article will discuss the theoretical and practical aspects of using oral presentation method in the EFL communication classroom. It addresses issues and observations concerning the pro and cons of the technique through action research which run for one semester. Students at this university are obliged to pass English Communication subject in order to fulfil the graduate requirement by the university. Majority of them have a limited amount of exposure to English language oral communication before they enter the university. Incapable of communicating fluently in English (internal factor such as afraid of making a mistake while communicating in English; and external factor such as lack of the exposure to the English-speaking environment) lead to the unmotivated students. The oral presentation is a learner-centred activity that benefits students in improving their language communication skills. The method involves all four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing). Many researches show that oral presentation is a very challenging method for both instructors and students. Speaking in front of others in the target language stress the students, and the process might drain the classroom learning process. However, as the ability to communicate more than one language and being able to speak the international language (English) will largen the undergraduates future undertaking, oral presentation method shall not be abort for its pedagogical benefits to the EFL classroom. Imposing oral presentation as one of the assessments to pass the compulsory English Communication subject is hoped to cultivate students' motivation and willingness to learn English. The purpose of the action research conducted is to help the instructor to employ oral presentations in the EFL classroom effectively.

(keywords: oral presentation, EFL, motivation, action research, language skills.)

Introduction

Language is not only used for communication purpose, but it is also a tool to connects people, various networks, knowledge and information. Initially, human invented languages for everyday usage. It then evolved through the literary world where today, poems, novels and litterer works could be found and

appreciated. Today, some people can communicate in several languages; some people are fluent in 2 languages with very different forms and grammar. It has become prevalent to find people who are fluent in two or more languages in various situations around the world. Many studies work to identify the cognitive development bilinguals. The factors that motivate people to speak more than one language have also been a subject of considerable research by Language experts in the world. Not everyone in this world has the bilingual or multilingual ability. Especially those who stay and live in an environment that only practices one language. Many can use only one language in their daily lives. In some places, as the second language (beside the primary language use) is irrelevant for daily life usage, foreign languages are often ignored and discriminated.

The world today is often disputing the concept of globalization. Globalization has been around for centuries; since man began to move for various purposes; for example, Silk Road. People move from one area to another, and they learn different languages according to the area they landed. Through language, people learn the culture, knowledge, art, and more from each other. Human, since civilization has had the skills and desire to communicate in more than one language. Human first learned a foreign language before they could learn anything about different society, system, style, art and culture. For example, when communicating to a Japanese (in any situation), someone who is not fluent in Japanese will most likely begin to say words such as “*Arigatou Gozaimasu (means thank you)*,” “*Konnichiwa (means good afternoon, good evening)*” or “*Sumimasen (means excuse me)*.” This is an example of a Japanese word. A foreigner who utters these words when communicating with the Japanese community has begun the process of getting to know and learn Japanese by first learning the language itself.

Background

In Japan, the level of accuracy in the English language among the students has always worried the educators. As the Foreign Language (English) is not compulsory for everyday use in Japan, it is difficult for EFL students to practice the language skills and patterns they have learned in class. (MEXT) The Ministry of Education, Sport, Science and Technology Japan never stop concerning about the students' ability to master the English language in Japan. Various techniques for learning the English language have been introduced and updated from time to time; that resulting some confusing students and also instructors in the pursuit of the latest language techniques.

Teaching and learning aids are easily found in the market and generously provided within the university. However, why is the English language proficiency level of university students still low? Students always find that oral presentation is a difficult task in the language classes. According to the sociocultural theory, one of the factors in second language acquisition is that learners can use the target

language that they are learning in meaningful activities. Language is a socio phenomenon, and by doing a lot of meaningful or purposeful language activities will help them to improve, Brooks and Wilson (2014).

The table below shows the differences in attitudes of students learning the English language in this

Learners	Types	Motivation in learning the English Language
Students with background	This type of student has English usage background (regardless of the level). Whether they have family members stayed abroad or from overseas. They are familiar with the English language besides the English classes.	Students of this group often have a degree of desire to develop strong English proficiency.
Students who have traveled abroad	This type of students is those who have travelled or visited abroad before.	They show a good interest in communicating in the English language, especially with international students or instructors from overseas.
Students who joined a study abroad program (either short term or long term).	This group of students has spent time on an overseas study program. It might be a short-term program or a long-term program. There are two types of study abroad programs offer to the students at this college; 1. Malaysia Study Trip Program (Short Term) 2. California Study Trip Program (Short / Long Term)	The concentration and awareness of English are solid among these students. They do not hesitate to use English when they were abroad. When they returned to Japan, they did not show a refusal to communicate in the English language.
Students who have a keen interest/intention to travel to another country	They are the group of students that will take the opportunities to interact and communicate in the English language anytime they could. They have plans to travel abroad either to the program offered by the university or to the private program.	The motivation for this group is the highest. They are consistent in practising English every day.

Students who are interested in foreign languages and cultures	Students in this group may not have the opportunity to go abroad. Nevertheless, they show the right attitude towards the culture and concerns of foreign countries. For example, interested in international artists is also the reason they love to learn a foreign language.	They do not show consistency in mastering English language.
Students who aspire to work with international companies	Students learn English to enable them to enter international companies when they graduate from university. This group was also seen as a very diligent group and spent much time to memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules. They have the goal of getting high scores in the qualifying exams, for example, TOEIC.	They show the right attitude towards learning English. However, they are more likely to pass the English examinations only.

What about the elements that make one unwilling to communicate in English? Students always complain or worry about making mistakes when they start speaking in the English language. The anxiety of making a mistake in English is so severe that it undermines a student's motivation. The question is why should students worry about speaking English? Are they often being laughed at if they make a mistake in English? Is it wrong to say the wrong words?

The fear of making mistakes when speaking in the English language will not help the person to succeed in mastering the language. Because of this fear of making a mistake, the student is reluctant to learn the language. A university is a place that produces high intellectual capital that can communicate in more than one language. By that, it will not only offer more opportunities in the future of the student, but also helps them continue to learn new knowledge throughout their lives. As a student whose primary responsibility is to obtain knowledge, they need to overcome feelings of fear not to make mistakes in the learning process.

For example, in mathematics, students will make many mistakes in the process of solving math problems. They do not have to feel ashamed of their mistakes. Even error after error leads them to the right answer. Therefore, when learning English, students do not need to be afraid of making mistakes. Students shouldn't feel embarrassed if they misspell English words or make mistakes in grammar.

According to one writer, *“After all, language is very forgiving. It does not have to be exact; it just has to be close. English is spoken as a second language all around the world in different accents and with*

various foibles, yet we all manage to understand each other.”

Action Research

Action Research is an old technique helping instructor generating solutions in their teaching and learning process. It is a recursive process where all the steps are not linear. Instructor act as a participant and also the researcher in this study.

Action Research (Phase 1)

Problem Statement

Throwing a student from non-English speaking background to present their ideas, opinions using the target language only is usually tricky and stressful. The fear of speaking in front of others, adding with the usage of the language they are not familiar with will decrease their motivation to learn the language. It happened when they make a mistake or taking a long time to understand the language structure, which is different from their L1 (mother tongue). Whether students are from groups with high or low levels of motivation; often students complain that the English language is difficult, especially with the pronunciation of the vocabulary. Many express their lack of self-confidence in communicating in English. Many are good in answering grammar and writing questions but face difficulty in speaking. Poor speaking ability is always labelled as a weakness in the target language.

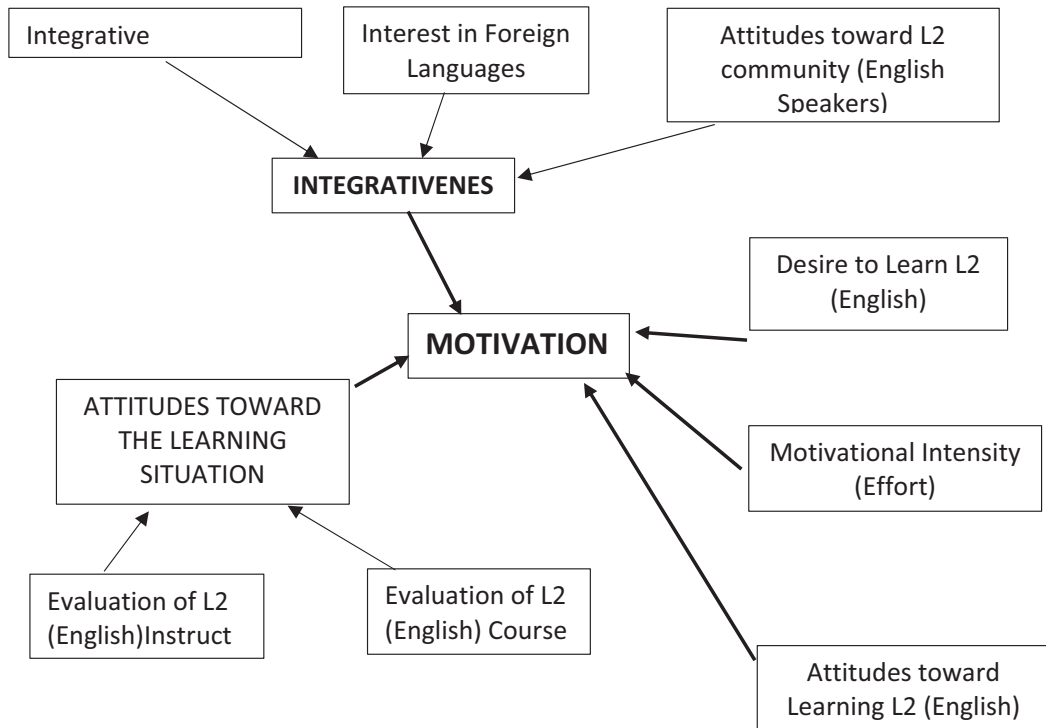
Moreover, if oral presentation steps and skills are not taught thoroughly and correctly, the difficulty of the tasks involved in presenting in front of others can be challenging for the students, Brooks and Wilson (2014). Besides, “students that are not given the space to apply the target language and interact among each other remain outside the language community and therefore fail to improve in the target language (Apple, 2006, p.286).

According to Tsou & Huang (2012), not many opportunities are given for oral presentation in the university level itself, especially the students who are not taken part in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) program. Some are reported not getting chances to conduct presentation even in their first language.

The issue of Japanese university students not having enough opportunity to talk in English classes is one of the factors that lead to language incompetency. Students are under pressure to prepare for their high school centre entrance exam. Not many hours could be spare for English oral communication purposes. Even during the oral communication period, most of the class time is used for the teacher-centred activities or drill-oriented activities. Japanese students' inexperience communicates in English orally will lead to the difficulty to conduct any presentation in the English language.

Previous studies examining various factors have made Japanese students a step behind in acquiring the proficient in English. Internal factors such as the motivation of the individual are not something new in learning the language learner attitudes and performances. Students' motivation for learning a foreign language is different. Factors that influence motivation include Integrative, interest and beliefs. According to Gardner (2010), motivation in acquiring a new/second language is four distinct aspects of the second language acquisition process. First is the antecedent factors that could be the biological or experiential such as ethnicity, age and learning history. Second would be the individual difference; followed by the contexts of the language acquisition, and the fourth is the learning outcomes itself.

Gardner has outlined elements that contribute to one's motivation, as shown below



*Gardner's Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993),
Dornyei & Ryan, (2015).*

Types of Oral Presentation Method

Al-Issa & Al-Qubtan (2010), Oral Presentation in EFL Classrooms.

Types	Students' Proficiency Levels	Methods	Assessment
Controlled	Beginner	<p>The instructor needs to confine the topics, choice of grammar and vocabularies.</p> <p>As students have limited knowledge of the L2, they should not be forced to conduct an extended presentation. Indeed, a short and straightforward presentation will be a great advantage for them to overcome the difficulty of using the target language.</p> <p>Suggestions: Poster presentation</p>	<p>Building students' confidence and motivation is the main objective.</p>
Guided	Low-intermediate	<p>The instructor guides the students in choosing topics that equivalent to their language proficiency level.</p> <p>Students do not have to deliver sophisticated structural and lexical items at this stage.</p> <p>Guidance of correct grammar usage, building the proper sentence structure to the students might strengthen their language skills.</p> <p>Suggestions: PowerPoint</p>	<p>A proper assessment of a student's language accuracy and provide feedback</p>
Free	Upper-intermediate to advanced level	<p>Students will have freedom in deciding their topics, grammar, phrases and presentation pattern.</p> <p>They should be independent to be in charge of the preparation until the end of the presentation.</p> <p>They can collect data and do summarization and prepare presentable speech to the audiences.</p> <p>Suggestions: PowerPoint, free talk</p>	<p>Questions & Answers sessions for the assessment</p>

Benefits of Oral Presentation

1. The method is student-centred

Brooks and Wilson (2014) suggest that by applying oral presentation, the method in the EFL classroom, the learner-centred will be the focus. Students will receive the task and then they will have to prepare the presentation from the beginning until completion. Students will take control of the information provided, tone of language, choice of word, and how they want to present the topic. Interaction during the presentation between the presenter and audience will give opportunities to both sides to use English in their communication, for instance during the questions & answers session in English. As for group presentation where a few of students will work together, they indeed are having the chances or space to get in touch with the target language; may it be during the presentation planning or setting up the idea.

2. The method requires the use of all four language skills

Doing a presentation in the classes involves all language skills (reading, speaking, writing and listening). Speaking ability is the main component that always relates to the presentation method. Students doing the presentation, they speak and give a speech. However, before the delivery, where students prepare the script, ideas, information, and outlining their theme, they do the research and go through the reading process (reading skill). This part not only needs them to collect the reading material, but they also need to summarize the reading and put the information into the presentable form such as PowerPoint, poster or just speech (writing skill). Having a question and answer session, especially from the audience, will provide an opportunity to both presenter and audience to practice the listening skill. Like Brooks & Wilson (2014) mentioned; the communicative nature of presentations allows audience members to improve their listening skills more than listening to the tape or a lecture; the listener is allowed to confirm their understanding by having the interactive communication with the presenter.

3. The method provides students with practical language tasks

Living in a monolingual society such as Japan nowadays does not promise the safe zone of using only the L1 (mother tongue) anymore. The change that globalization and immigration have brought to society is significantly building the pressure of learning more than one language. Many elite companies require employees to be able to understand English. It is evident with the minimum requirement of proficiency English requirements such as TOEIC, or TOEFL. Jobs in many fields in the era of globalization demand L2 language skills; may it be

the ability to write an email in English, able to understand the customers' inquiries, complains or able to explain to people who are not Japanese about the organization or any related situation. Having the practice during their undergraduate's time might provide students at least one time of the practical language tasks. Indeed, carrying the ability to use L2 will benefits the owner for their future development.

Action Research (Phase 2) Procedures

This action research conducted during the fall semester from September 2019 to the end of January 2020. There are only two classes involves and they are compulsory to pass the English Communication course. The scores of the presentations (using PowerPoint) is taken as the final assessment for this course. The language level of the two classes is divided into the beginner and intermediate. They are separated by placement test during the spring semester.

The study applied the concept of oral communication as the criteria for assessment. The study took 15 weeks (1 semester) and required students to pass the oral examination (oral presentation) 3 times. Before the actual three presentations, the techniques and words and sentences used are taught to the students. All three of their presentation scores were recorded and graded as final semester scores for this course.

Pre-task

During the preparation stage, students understand the outline and requirements. The theme of the presentation is to talk anything that interests them in countries around the world. Students are free to pick any of their favourite countries to present. Next, the framework of the presentation is explained (guided); the students needed to gather information according to the outline they chose.

Example of the presentation outline

The image shows a document titled "PRESENTATION OUTLINE". It contains the following sections:

- INTRODUCTION:** A section with three horizontal lines for writing.
- MAIN:** A section containing three sub-sections labeled "Page 1", "Page 2", and "Page 3", each followed by a table with five horizontal lines.
- CONCLUSION:** A section with three horizontal lines for writing.

At the bottom of the page, there is a small illustration of a person standing at a podium in front of a screen, with three audience members seated in front of them.

Once they have decided the topic, they learned to locate and gather the proper information needed to prepare their presentation speech and content. The students are allowed to use L1 (doing the translation) in their presentation preparation.

Task-development

Students will take the responsibilities as the author and designer to their performance. They will decide on the type and amount of information to present to the class.



One of the presentations conducted in the classroom.

Action Research (Phase 3) Analysis

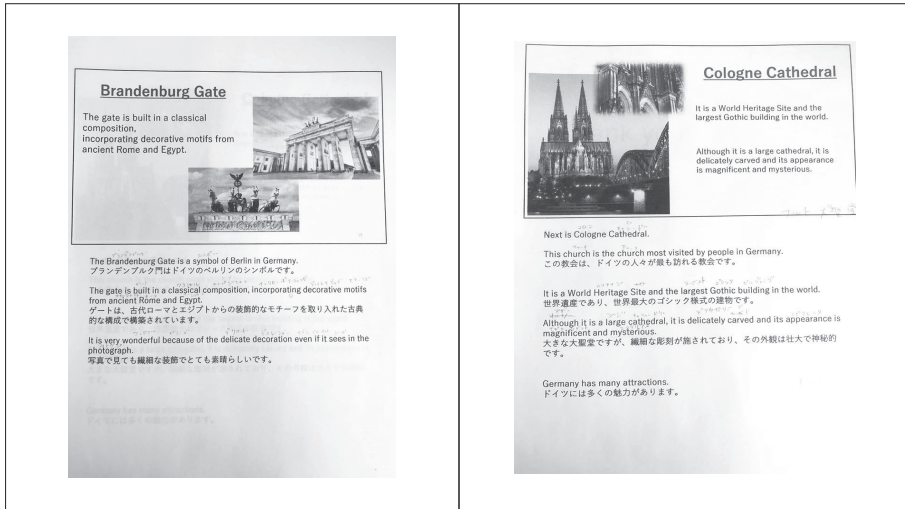
Post-task

One of the student's presentation PowerPoint script (with consent) is taken as an example in this study;

	<p>With a simple self-introduction, students are encouraged to use straightforward and natural phrases to remember.</p>
	<p>The outline of the presentation. Students are allowed to use L1 in order to have a better understanding of their content.</p>

	<p>Student started the presentation with the background. And then the student explained in a straightforward sentence structure about the country.</p> <p>The student used Katakana to sound the words.</p>
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Content



Action Research (Phase 4) Conclusion and Reflection

Room for improvement (Observation)

Most of the time, the audiences struggled to stay awake during the presentation.

After some observation; the reasons lead to the boredom during the presentation are as below;

1. The presentation was long and too formal.
2. Many difficult words used, and audiences could not understand the main idea of the presentation, and this will slowly turn the presentation process into a dull classroom activity.
3. The presenter is not well prepared. Many usages of difficult vocabularies resulted from a lack of reading skill. The presenter was not able to grasp the main point and explain the idea in their way. They tend to assume that the translated words must be applied in the presentation precisely as it is.
4. The wrong topic. Students are free to choose any topic that interests them to present. Some of the presentation topics were difficult to be understood by the audiences.

At the end of the whole process, many instructors might feel reluctant to continue using presentation method in the language classroom; and students feel pressure and scare of doing the presentation. Moreover, this will lead to the reluctances in learning English.

Conclusion

Getting students to speak English is not an easy task for most of the instructors. Especially facing unmotivated students. Some students talk 50% of English during the class, some only utter a phrase or

two in the class (partly due to the classroom activities which they are reluctant to take part). Communicate in a different language besides one's mother tongue takes a lot of courage and causes by many factors. However, it is not an impossible goal. Forbid students from using L1 in the class might lead to the perception that L1 is inferior to English, using L1 is wrong and these will stress the learners in the language acquisition process and push them further away from being motivated to learn a new language. Using L1 while completing the L2 task is not a taboo. Doing translation to grasp the idea or topic of the L2 will help the students to have a better understanding of the language. Presentation method will benefit the students only if they understand the task, the objective and fully involve in the whole process. What instructors should have done is to make sure that the proper skills and required points are thoroughly taught before the actual presentation. Having a free conversation in every class might lead to the good habits for the students to have chances of using English. Allow the students to do the memorization. Indeed, memorization is a helpful tool to familiarize students to the L2 phrases, expressions, lexical and structural items. Good memorization also will help the students to gain their confidence in using L2.

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