

The use of self-assessment with video data in English presentations: A course design to develop autonomy and skills on an individual basis

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1. Introduction

The importance of helping students become more autonomous in their learning, has become one of the prominent themes in the area of university education in Japan. In 2012, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) announced the “University Reform Action Plan,” which stipulates that one of the key abilities that universities should develop is the students’ capability to exercise control over their learning. Language education is no exception. So far various approaches to promote learners’ autonomy have been introduced and exercised in the field of language education. Among them, self-assessment has been one of the prominent approaches to promote learners’ autonomy.

This research is on self-assessment conducted by a practicing teacher in the course for English presentations. The study aims to reveal whether or not the use of self-assessment with video recording could help develop autonomy, as well as English presentation skills in a classroom setting where students with a wide spectrum of English levels are learning.

This is an elective semester course for 2nd-4th year students in the Faculty of Business at Aichi Shukutoku University. The class size has been small from Spring 2015 through Fall 2016. The fall semester of 2016 is still underway, so the objects of analysis will mainly be on the courses for the first three semesters. The students’ English levels varied from elementary to advanced (see Figure 1.1)¹.

The pre-course questionnaire shows students’ lack of opportunity and confidence to use English as a communication tool in their lives. Only 18 percent of students reported to have someone to communicate with in English. None of the elementary and intermediate learners reported to have any experience with presenting something in English. Some students reported that they did not make presentations in Japanese either. More than half of the students reported that they were poor at English speaking skills. The reasons why students would like to improve their English presentation skills in the course also varied

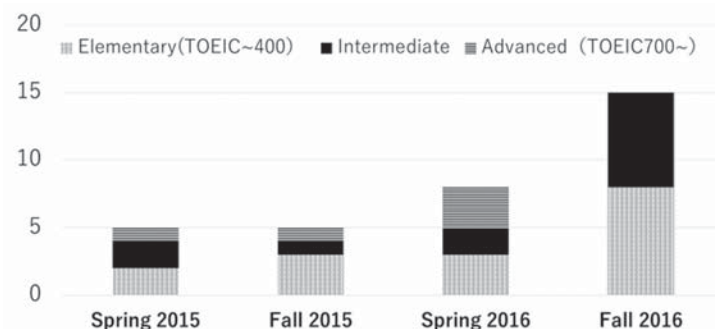


Figure 1.1 Students' English levels

from gaining confidence when speaking English, preparing for studying abroad to assisting with job hunting. The results indicates that the course would be challenging for most of the students, especially elementary and intermediate learners who had little experience with speaking in English.

2. Course design

The course was designed to develop English presentation skills through experiential learning. The central part of the learning design was the students' presentations as well as their self-assessment or reflections. Kolb (1984), who has developed experiential learning, sees the notion of learning as a cyclical process that integrates immediate experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization and action. Within this cycle, reflection plays the role of the bridge between experience and theoretical conceptualization. Benson (2013) notes:

The experiential model thus proposes a methodology to help learners to integrate knowledge into their own systems of meaning and take control of their own learning. The methodology emphasizes the importance of reflection. (p. 41)

Students were required to give presentations five times and each presentation was video recorded. As each student watched the video, they assessed themselves on a descriptive assessment sheet. In addition, the course teacher held individual counseling sessions with each student during the subsequent class session. At this time, they discussed what each of them observed about the student's presentation while exchanging their assessment sheets. Although the course included some teacher-centered activities such as instructing pronunciation and intonation, key expressions, speech structures, etc., more self-managed learning was acquired. In addition to the self-assessment of their performance, students

carried out peer assessment, as well. The teacher played the role of facilitator to encourage and assist learners to become more autonomous in their learning.

3. Literature review

Self-assessment “has been a prominent theme in the literature on autonomy and language-testing field” (Benson, 2013, p. 168). The literature on autonomy has placed greater emphasis on the formative aspects of internal assessment while, in the language testing field, the learner’s ability to match their own assessments with external assessments of their proficiency has been of greater significance.

In the literature of autonomy, a number of benefits of self-assessment for language learning have been reported. Blanche (1988) observed that self-assessment leads to increased learners’ motivation. Oscarson (1989) identified the following four main benefits of formal self-assessment for learners: (1) It trains learners to evaluate the effectiveness of their communication, (2) It raises learner’s awareness of the learning process, (3) It enhances their knowledge of the variety of possible goals in language learning, and (4) It expands the range of assessment criteria to include areas in which learners have special competence, such as the evaluation of their own needs and affective dimensions of the learning process. Those findings are significant themselves, but need to be closely examined if they may apply to a specific classroom setting like the one in this study: classroom of English presentations which includes students with elementary English levels who are lack of experience and confidence in speaking English.

On the other hand, literature on the language-testing field, has investigated the reliability of self-assessment. For instance, Dlaska and Krekeler (2008) investigated the reliability of self-assessments of pronunciation skills of advanced learners and revealed that even advanced learners continued to find it difficult to self-assess pronunciation skills accurately. Their study only analyzed advanced learners’ reliability of self-assessment. Therefore, lower-level learners’ reliability needs to be further examined.

Regarding video-recording techniques, a large number of literature have suggested that the use of video data could significantly help improve communication skills (Smith and Sodano 2011; Nakai 2011; Hamilton 2012; Guo 2013). Guo (2013) examined the effectiveness of video data on graduate students’ presentation performances and their ability to learn and improve from such data. He revealed that “the use of video recordings helped improve graduate students’ presentation skills in the area of verbal and non-verbal communications, organization, and engagement of the audience” (p. 99).

Literature on video recordings provided strong evidence that self-assessment with the

use of video recordings helped improve presentation skills. However, students in this study were different from the participants in previous literature for some reasons. First, this is a class of L2 learners with a wide spectrum of English levels while participants in previous literature on video studies were mainly native speakers of English. Secondly, except for advanced students, none of the students had any experience with providing presentations in English. They were in a so-called “English as a Foreign Language (EFL)” environment and had little opportunity to communicate with someone in English.

The study aimed to reveal the effectiveness of the use of self-assessment with video recording in terms of developing autonomy, as well as English presentation skills. The uniqueness of this study lies in the fact that this study examined the learning process of presentations and reflection. In addition, it also observed if elementary learners who lacked experience and confidence with speaking English could develop autonomy with their English presentation skills.

4. Research method

The sample included 18 students who took the course “English Presentation” (5 in spring and fall semesters of 2015, 8 in spring semester of 2016, 15 in fall semester of 2016). Although the sample size was small, the author looked in-depth not only at self-assessments and presentations, but also their attitudes and classroom environment through close observation. The data included students’ assessment, video data of students’ presentations, a pre-course questionnaire, and post-course questionnaire, interview data and observation notes².

The sampling procedure was as follows: In the first week, a pre-course questionnaire was carried out to find out their English levels, their experience in English and Japanese presentations, their attitudes toward English, and their course expectations.

Each presentation was video-recorded, students were required to examine their practices with video data. The self-assessment sheets did not use a numerical scoring method, but a written, descriptive method. They were required to write presentation skills they perceived they did well with and the skills which needed to improve.

There were two reasons that the author used a descriptive method of self-assessment. One reason was that students wouldn’t feel pressured to score their performance. As noted above, more than half of the students lacked confidence when giving English presentation skills. For those students, scoring might have been a pressure, which might have hampered them from focusing on their content and enjoying their learning.

Another reason was that a descriptive method enables learners to pick up the elements

Figure 4.1 Assessment Criteria

1. Content	
• Attention-getting device	• Selection of main ideas
• Clear purpose statement	• Adequate summary
• Clear organization of ideas	• Closing statement
• Effective use of language	
2. Visual Aids	
• Interesting audiovisual aids	
3. Delivery	
• Volume	• Facial expression
• Eye contact	• Poise/Self-control
• Vocal expression/Tone	• Pronunciation/Articulation
4. Grammar	

5. Others (Messages that stick)	
• Is it simple?	• Is it credible?
• Is it unexpected?	• Is it emotional?
• Is it concrete?	• Does it have elements of story?

they wanted to focus on. It meant that they would have more control over their learning. On the other hand, when scoring themselves, they should examine all of the presentation criteria. If the scores were very low, they might become overwhelmed. It appeared to be very difficult for the elementary learners to modify and overcome all of their weaknesses at once. It is possible that this type of self-assessment scoring method could discourage elementary learners with low self-esteem.

Students basically picked up positive and negative aspects of their performance from assessment criteria sheet. Figure 4.1 shows the assessment criteria sheet given to students at the beginning of the course. Although the teacher encouraged the students to refer to it, it was not obligatory to refer to the assessment criteria. The sheet consisted of 4 skills: content, visual aids, delivery, and grammar. In addition to them, the sheet included the criteria of sticky messages written in the textbook for the course: Garr Reynold's *Presentation Zen: Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery* (2014).

The assessment criteria sheet did not include detailed criteria for grammatical skills. Instead, the teacher explained frequent errors both individually and to the class collectively. In regards to visual aids, the teacher also did not provide detailed criteria for the self-assessment sheet. Instead, the teacher referred students to use their textbook which had detailed explanations on how to create presentation slides, including with detailed examples.

Language for self-assessment was either in Japanese or English. The teacher told the students that the primary objective of the self-assessment was to reflect their own practice. In that sense, it was better to use the language that they were able to observe accurately. As a result, only advanced students wrote self-assessments in English.

At the end of the course, a post-course questionnaire was completed. The questions

asked were: the skills improved, skills still yet to be improved and comments on reflection with video-data. Intensive interview for some students who took the course was also conducted.

5. Analysis and findings

The analysis consists of two parts. One is the content analysis of students' self-assessment and the other is the teachers' observations of students' presentation performances.

5.1 Content analysis of students' self-assessment

Self-assessment with video data embarrassed some of the students at the beginning of the course, but all of the students who answered the post-course questionnaire reported that video recording techniques brought an advantage of reflecting themselves closely and effectively. Then, what did they observe?

The author extracted key words from a collection of students' self-assessment and divided the codes into four categories: content, visual, delivery and grammar. Figure 5.1 shows the number of references to each skill.

5.1.1. Delivery

Most of the self-assessment of delivery skills were based on assessment criteria (Figure 4.1). Figure 5.1 shows that the description of delivery outnumbers other skills. This indicates that delivery skills are the ones that learners could easily self-assess. The number of negative comments on delivery is also outstanding compared with other skills. The data suggests that it would be easier for students to find out the points to improve than other skills.

Another characteristic is that self and teacher's observations are closely aligned in assessment of volume, facial expressions, eye contact and poise. This indicates that students

Figure 5.1

	Positive	Negative	Total
Content	41	28	69
Visual	17	8	25
Delivery	62	104	166
Grammar	4	5	9

could accurately assess these presentation skills even if the teacher does not advise them. On the other hand, the analysis found out that the students couldn't identify pronunciation errors. This was true for all the students regardless of their English level. Dłaska and Krekeler (2008) revealed that even advanced learners found it difficult to self-assess pronunciation skills accurately. The data of this study supports Dłaska and Krekeler's findings.

5.1.2. Grammar

The least mentioned observations in the self-assessment were grammatical skills. (see Figure 5.1). Even though the teacher explained frequent errors when she gave comments on their presentations at counseling sessions and wrote it down on the teacher's assessment sheets, few were able to identify their grammatical errors. If there were any comments on grammatical skills, they were too abstract, such as "I need to improve grammatical skills"³ to make any noticeable improvements. This indicates that it would be difficult for students to self-assess their grammar even if they revisit their presentations with video.

During the course and in the post-course interviews, the author asked some students why there was no mention about grammar in self-assessment. An interviewee whose English level was intermediate told me that she simply did not understand whether her grammar was right or not. She also told me that even if the teacher identified her grammatical errors and made corrections, she would make similar mistakes because she lacked very basic grammatical knowledge. The fact that elementary students made similar grammatical errors again and again, seems to indicate that she was not an isolated case.

In addition to the lack of basic grammatical knowledge, there seems to be another reason why students did not mention grammar. That is, students did not appear to take grammar seriously. In other words, they seemed to pay more attention to other presentation skills than grammatical skills. Students' comments, such as "I don't feel grammar is of great importance support this assumption"⁴.

5.1.3. Content

The number of references to content was the second among the four categories. While delivery had more negative comments than positive ones, content had more positive comments than negative ones. There was a considerable gap between the teacher's and students' observations. For instance, a student commented that "I organized my presentation well without any contradictions. The storyline was clear."⁵ On the other hand, the teacher noted, "You should make it clear how the three key words were connected to your main idea."

There was also a considerable difference between lower and higher-level students in the quality of self-assessment. Vague and rough comments such as “I could convey what I wanted to⁶” were seen in lower level students’ assessments. On the other hand, students with higher English level gave more specific analysis on organization, title, core point, storyline and if it was “the message that stick.” Some of their descriptions were so specific that they could understand how to make improvements. Here is an advanced student’s comment on content.

Because I chose a really sad story to talk, so that’s totally difficult to find a position to make a communication with the audience. Actually, as I prepared this story, I just had a thought to make everyone cry because it’s so sad for me...Although, I’ll try to make more communication even I’m gonna have a sad story. I think that will let the presentation more unexpected and attracted.

Although there were some grammatical errors, the student describes what she lacked and how to make improvements in detail. Compared with higher-level learners, elementary and intermediate learners had difficulty in finding out the specific problems about speech contents.

Another noticeable characteristic of students’ self-assessment on content is the increased observations which showed their willingness to communicate with the audience. Remarkably even the lower-level students made similar comments like these: “I want to ask question to engage with the audience⁷”; “It’s no use if the audience didn’t understand my message⁸”; “I came to think about how to entertain the audience⁹”; “I came to make English sentences simpler which made sense to myself and the audience¹⁰.” These observations indicate that they became aware of English as a communication tool, not a mere subject to study in school.

5.1.4. Visuals

References to visuals were not as frequent as delivery and content. The analysis varied from the amount of characters in a slide to the use of pictures. There was no difference in the quality of assessment between lower and higher-level students. While the author could not see noticeable improvements in grammar, there was remarkable improvements in visuals. Although students did not comment on visuals, they consciously or unconsciously found the points to improve. In the post-questionnaire survey, all the students who answered, reported that they could see improvements with their skills for creating slides.

Regarding visuals, self-assessment with video data did not seem to be as helpful as other

skills because video mainly focused on the presenter and did not clearly show the slides. Self-assessment with the copy of slides or peer assessment in classroom which the teacher provided once in the course, would be more helpful.

5.2. Teacher's observations on student's presentations

The most significant improvement that the teacher found was that presenters became more engaged with the audience. In other words, students came to be more aware of how the audience would react to their presentations. Hamilton (2012) notes that "video offers another set of eyes and provides an additional lens." (p. 10). It enabled them to see their presentation practices from the audience's point of view. The change was not only seen in advanced learners, but also in elementary and intermediate learners. No improvement, however, was seen in students who had low attendance rates and rarely submitted self-assessment sheets.

The change was remarkable considering that most of the students, except a few advanced students, only read their manuscript without paying attention to the audience at the first presentation. The teacher felt that it was like talking to him/herself. The change took place gradually. Some of the changes included frequent eye contact, entertaining visuals, asking questions, changing the tone to emphasize something, organizing presentations more understandably. Despite that the teacher saw those improvements, there was no obvious change in the number of negative and positive comments on those skills from the first presentations to the last ones. This was probably because students' expectations toward themselves became higher.

Another significant change seen in elementary learners was to make English simpler. When they made manuscripts, some wrote them in Japanese and translated them into English. They used the expressions found in a dictionary, even though they did not know the words or expressions well. As a result, they sometimes did not understand what they said. However, they gradually realized that they needed to make a sentence they could understand so that the audience would understand their messages.

6. Conclusion

The study aimed to reveal whether or not the use of descriptive self-assessment with video data could help develop autonomy as well as English presentation skills. In order to find the answer, the study mainly analyzed the process of students' observations. Through the analysis, the study concludes that the self-assessment employed in this course was effective

regardless of learner's English level.

The most beneficial effect was that students became more engaged with the audience while they made presentations. The change was obvious in elementary and intermediate learners because most of them did not pay any attention to the audience at the beginning of the course. They started to try to make the audience understand what they said. Some started to think about how to entertain the audience. Although less obvious, advanced students also improved their skills in this area, as well.

The author considered that the change occurred through the activities of self-assessment. The analysis shows that the self-assessment made students well aware of their presentation skills including volume, gesture, eye contact, facial expressions, and pose. The self-assessment also enabled them to see their presentation practices from the audience's point of view, which led to the change of their performance. Video recording technology significantly helped improve their skills.

Their awareness of their presentation skills led to their increased motivation to communicate with the audience in English. It is possible that it could further motivate them to improve English skills such as grammar and pronunciation. The results of the post-course questionnaires and interview survey indicates some students' positive attitudinal change toward English. Some reported that they became more confident in speaking English, and others reported to start to learn grammar and listening skills. This shows that they became more autonomous in their learning.

Some people might say that English presentations are too difficult for elementary learners who lack basic English knowledge. They might think that acquiring basic English knowledge should be first. However, the study proposes the opposite methodology could work: acquiring English presentation skills first through experiential learning. The experiential learning in this course might not have greatly improved elementary learners' English skills, but it led to increased motivation to convey a message to someone in English and to learn specific English skills. The course design focused on presentations and reflections would work even in a classroom setting where students with a wide spectrum of English levels are learning. Through the learner-centered activities, each student could control their own leaning.

Lastly, what needs to be examined further in the future is how to facilitate them to realize the importance of grammar and pronunciation skills. It is no doubt that those skills are essential to improve English proficiency. However, some students did not realize it. It is possible that assessment criteria caused the failure. In the future study, the author will reexamine the assessment criteria to facilitate learners to realize the importance of those skills.

Notes

- 1 This figure was based on the result of a pre-course questionnaire and my observation of the students' presentations.
- 2 All of those survey data was collected based on the students' agreement.
- 3–10 The comments were originally written in Japanese. The author translated it into English.

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