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Effective Evaluation Methods in an English Public Speaking Course for EFL University Students in Japan

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of evaluation methods in an EFL public speaking course which seeks to increase confidence in giving a speech in public for Japanese students who are learning English. Participants were Japanese students at a private university in Japan who were enrolled in a 15-week public speaking course (n=43). The survey was conducted during the semester, and students gave five speeches during that time. The survey results showed correlations by the end of the course between comments from instructor and students' increased feeling of confidence in English speechmaking. Japanese EFL university students gained confidence in making a speech after receiving comments from the instructor, and they were more confident in their English speaking ability overall by the end of this class.

Keywords: public speaking, foreign language, higher education, speech instruction

Introduction

Recently, many Japanese companies have been using English as a common language, and many of them are multicultural workplaces. Many companies expect or want universities to prepare students to begin work once they graduate. Therefore, universities need to teach all the English skills students need, and English presentation is one of these necessary skills. Japanese workers will have more chances than ever to give a speech or presentation in English while at work. In the future, it will be more common, so it is very

important to prepare Japanese university students with the skills they will need in their careers.

The researcher has taught two different public speaking courses at private universities in Japan. In one such course, Japanese students give speeches in their own, Japanese language, and in the other course, they give speeches in English. In both courses, Japanese students have a difficult time speaking in front of peers. Giving a speech in their native language is hard, but giving a speech in a foreign language is even more challenging because Japanese students have to learn English and the skills of public speaking at the same time. Many students try to avoid giving a speech in front of people because they say that they do not have enough confidence. They get nervous giving a speech in front of people.

When feeling nervous, Japanese students may forget to make eye contact, may speak too softly, and may seem hesitant. The researcher's previous study has found that Japanese speakers and English speakers use different styles of nonverbal communication. If Japanese students want to give an effective speech in English, they have to learn the nonverbal communication style common to speakers of the English language. The previous research showed that there were some benefits of teaching English nonverbal and verbal communication to Japanese EFL university students, and that students gain confidence after taking one semester of a public speaking course in English (Katsumata, Maekawa, & Fujiki, 2013).

Based on the researcher's previous studies, the researcher continues to identify the effects of a public speaking course for Japanese "English as a Foreign Language (EFL)" university students. The researcher believes that evaluation is important in the public speaking course. The researcher thinks there is a relationship between evaluation methodology and student confidence in giving a speech in front of people. Many Japanese EFL university students are afraid of negative evaluation and criticism of their speeches. Students believe that they will be severely criticized and humiliated after they perform their speech. Therefore, this study examines what kinds of evaluation methods are effective in helping Japanese EFL university students gain confidence in

public speaking.

This study seeks to identify the effects of a public speaking course for Japanese "English as a Foreign Language (EFL)" university students. The researcher hoped to discover what Japanese EFL university students need in their Public Speaking in English Course which will help them to gain confidence and give effective speeches. Ultimately, the researcher plans to design effective ways to teach public speaking in English so that Japanese university students can present with confidence. This research investigates the area of evaluation, so educators can design more effective EFL courses for Japanese students.

Public Speaking Course

This public speaking course is one of the required courses for second year students in a private university in Japan. Classes were held twice a week for 90 minutes each. Students were enrolled in a 15-week public speaking course. The goals of this public speaking course in English are (1) to teach students to give a constructive speech that audiences can understand; (2) to give students the opportunity to make various types of speeches; (3) to further develop student's skills required for making an effective speech in English; and (4) to develop Japanese students' confidence in their ability to make speeches in English in a variety of situations.

The size of the class is limited to 25 students. The students are assigned the textbook and practice their speeches in pairs, in small groups, and in large groups in class. The students in this study were given a topic for each speech. The length of a speech is 1 to 3 minutes, and students are required to give five speeches. The title of the first speech is "Self Introduction." Students introduce themselves for one minute. This is the first speech and students are usually very nervous, so the speech time is short. The second speech is "My Favorite Thing." Students introduce something they like for two minutes and give two reasons and an episode. For this speech, an objective is for the speaker to give detailed information to the listeners. The third speech title is "My Opinion." The speech length is three minutes for the third and fourth speeches. The students read an article or news item, express their opinions,

and give a solution. The fourth speech title is "Compare & Contrast Two Cultures." Students choose a topic and compare and contrast two countries. The purpose is to help students focus on giving clear information and thoughtful opinions. The last speech is a one minute "Impromptu" speech. A speaker picks 5 cards and on each card is written a topic. The speaker chooses one topic from out of five and gives a speech quickly. This speech helps students to structure a speech without preparation.

Each student's speech was recorded on an IC recorder and copied to the student's USB right after the speech. Each student's speech was videotaped for about 40 seconds and put in the university class website. This way, students were able to see and hear their speeches. The instructor gave comments individually after each speech in the corner of the classroom, so other students will not hear the instructor's comments. While the instructor gives comments to a student, classmates write their comments about the speaker. Classmates listened to and evaluated each other's speech in class. Their evaluation included praise and constructive advice. There are seven evaluation points on the Comments Sheet of listeners. These points are "facial expressions," "eye-contact," "posture," "voice," "speed," "volume," and "structure." There are five answer choices for each point. The number [1] indicates the low score and [5] indicates the high score and listeners circle a number.

Students had to finish and turn in the evaluation form within a week. Students evaluated their own speeches based on evaluations by their peers and by their instructor, and by their own sense of how effectively they spoke. Each student had to listen to his/her speech and write it down, word for word. Then, each student corrected his/her own grammar, structure, and speech content. All the students' speeches were videotaped and uploaded to the university class website. Students were given a URL to access the website and could watch it on or off campus. They analyzed their own speeches based on watching their own speech at the class website, listening to their own speech from their USB, noting good and bad comments from the listeners and from the instructor, and careful points for next speech. They take notes to improve their next speech.

Conceptual Framework

In order to conceptualize this study, the researcher conducted a literature review and used her own prior research studies (Fujiki, Maekawa, & Katsumata, 2010; Katsumata, Maekawa, & Fujiki, 2013). The researcher found that one very important aspect of public speaking has been to build student confidence in speech making. The researcher wanted to discover the effect evaluation processes have on the confidence level of Japanese EFL students in a public speaking course in English.

It does not matter if people give a speech in their mother tongue or not, because public speaking can be stressful to many people. Samovar and McDaniel (2007) said that even many Americans feel public speaking can be very stressful. EFL learners, especially, have a high level of anxiety when they must give a speech in the English language in front of an audience. Japanese students want to know how to reduce their anxiety. They tend to avoid giving a speech in front of people (Liu & Jackson, 2008).

Previous research studies have shown that public speaking courses in Japanese are very effective and the confidence levels of Japanese students increase after students take the course (Fujiki, 2007; Fujiki, Maekawa, & Katsumata, 2010; Katsumata, Maekawa, & Fujiki, 2013). Samovar and McDaniel (2007) point out that many Asian cultures do not value speaking skills, but they value the ability to listen empathetically. Therefore, when people come from a culture not having a rhetorical tradition, they are more likely to experience increased anxiety when they must learn English as a second language. Japanese education programs do not include a class for public speaking before the university level of study; therefore, most students feel that they are not good at speaking and they get nervous talking in front of people (Araki, Kougo, & Tsutsui, 2000).

When Japanese EFL students think their English pronunciation and grammar are not accurate, they feel a lack of confidence (Harumi, 2010). Tokumoto and Shibata (2011) found that among Malaysian, Korean, and Japanese university students, Japanese students have the most negative feelings about their Japanese-accented English. Many Japanese students think that their speaking

skills in English are not good enough. The instruction of English in Japan is not designed to develop listening and speaking skills in junior high schools and high schools; therefore, many Japanese students do not have confidence in their English pronunciation.

Nakamura and Valens (2001) compared the different types of oral communication skills: presentation, interview, and discussion. Their findings show students felt interview and discussion tests were harder than a presentation test. The reason was that they could prepare their presentation beforehand, but they could not prepare for interview and discussion. For interview and discussion, students have to think and talk on an impromptu basis. According to this study, time for preparation is the advantage of the presentation test.

Many experts point out that if students give many speeches, their anxiety will go down (Mak, 2011; Norman, 1996). DeVito (2003) said that when students have more experience giving a speech, they are less likely to feel anxiety. Another way of reducing anxiety is to prepare well for a speech; in other words, good preparation reduces apprehension (Yahata, 2002; Yamaguchi, 1986; Walters & Walters, 2002).

Many experts said that practicing a presentation will reduce anxiety, and using a videotape of practicing a presentation will help (Murphy & Snyder, 1995; O'Hair, Friedrich, & Dixon, 2005). Glenn (1996) stated that watching the video of their speeches will help students to improve their presentation skills and reduce their communication apprehension. Therefore, the researchers think that it is important for students to prepare their speeches. Based on literature reviews, it is difficult for students to give a speech in front of people in English if they do not have multiple speaking experiences and enough preparation time.

Jones (1988) said that students are more likely to feel less pressure when evaluated by a small group. Hindo and Gonzalez-Prendes (2011) point out that the reason people are afraid of speaking in front of others is that they will be criticized hard and humiliated by listeners after their speech. Many Japanese EFL university students are afraid of negative evaluation and criticism of their

speeches. The researcher thinks that if students evaluate their own speeches, they can improve their speeches, which will lead to increased confidence.

Based on the literature review and the researcher's own previous studies (Katsumata, 1997; Fujiki, Maekawa, & Katsumata, 2010; Katsumata, Maekawa, & Fujiki, 2013), the researcher decided to ask two research questions:

- (1) Does giving a speech in English increase the confidence of Japanese EFL university students in their ability to speak English and their ability to speak in public?
- (2) What kind of evaluation methods will be effective in helping Japanese EFL university students gain confidence in public speaking?

Method

Participants

The researcher conducted this study with 43 Japanese learners of English: 29 were females and 14 were males. They were enrolled in a private university in Japan. The participants ranged in age from 19 to 23. Approximately 88% of them were 19 and 20 years old. Their age did not vary much because most Japanese adults do not go back to school later in life. The participants took a mandatory speech class in the English program which is taught intensively in Japan.

Procedure

Quantitative research methodology was used to conduct and analyze this research. The survey was administered to the participants in the spring of 2012. The students were asked various questions concerning the public speaking course they had just taken. There were four answer choices for each survey question. The responses were coded for statistical purposes with numerical values. The pilot test was done in the spring of 2010.

Results and Interpretations

The researcher reports the results of the survey. One of the questions was,

How many times did you give a speech in English in front of people before taking this course? Table 1 shows that some circled "3 to 9 times" (53.5%) and some students circled "1 or 2 times" (30.2%). "More than 10 times" was circled by 9.3% of the students, and "Never" was circled by 7.0%. From the results of Table 1, the researcher concludes that Japanese university students do not have many chances to give a speech in front of people before taking a public speaking course.

Table 1

The Number of Students who had Given a Speech in English Before Taking the Public Speaking Course

The Number of Speche	n=43	%
Never	3	7.0
1-2 times	13	30.2
3-9 times	23	53.5
More than 10 times	4	9.3

The results of the survey are as follows. One of the questions was, Do you think you need to learn public speaking in English? Table 2 shows that some circled "Public speaking skills in English are needed for present and future" (69.8%) . Some circled "Public speaking skills in English are needed for future" (20.9%) and some circled "Public speaking skills in English are not needed for present and future" (9.3%). From the results of Table 2, the researcher concludes that close to a majority of Japanese university students are aware of the need for public speaking skills in English. The researcher thinks the majority of students know that it is important to learn public speaking skills for the future. They are aware that they need to give presentation in English at work and have to prepare for it now.

Table 2

The Number of Students who Think the Public Speaking Course is Important

	n=43	%
Public speaking skills in English are not needed for present and future	4	9.3
Public speaking skills in English are needed for future	9	20.9
Public speaking skills in English are needed for present and future	30	69.8

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	30	69.8

Figure 1 indicates that the nervousness level decreased among Japanese EFL university students who had taken one semester of public speaking. It is obvious that students get nervous in making a speech until they take the public speaking course. After taking one semester of a public speaking course, there were differences in the students' nervousness in speechmaking. Figure 1 presents the change in students' reported nervousness level in speechmaking at the first class and their nervousness level reported at the time of the last class of their Public Speaking in English course. "Strongly Agree" (regarding nervousness) was circled by 85.4% of students in the first class, but this percentage decreased to 30.2% by the last class. "Agree" (regarding nervousness) was circled by 14.6% of students in the first class, and this percentage increased to 51.2% in the last class. "Disagree" (regarding nervousness) was circled by 0.0% of students in the first class, and this percentage increased to 16.3% in the last class. "Strongly Disagree" (regarding nervousness) was circled by 2.3% of students in the last class.

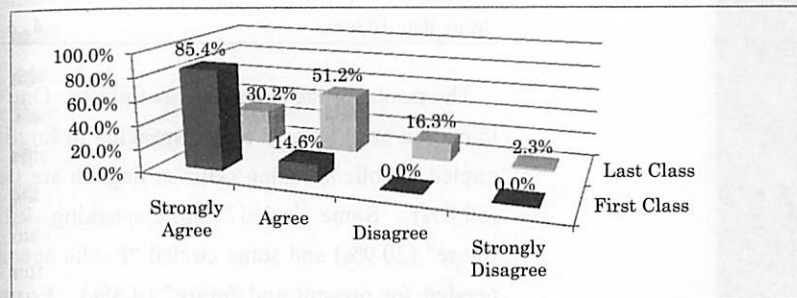


Figure 1. Change in Students' Nervousness about Their Ability to Give a Speech in English

From the results of Table 3, the researcher found there was a correlation between confidence at last class and the evaluation questions. The six evaluation questions: "Comments from the instructor," "Comments from classmates," "Watching own speech on video," "Write down own speech," "Self-analysis," and "Listening to classmates' speech." The researcher found there was a correlation between "Confidence at last class" and the evaluation questions. There are correlations between students' confidence in their ability to give a speech in English and "Comments from the instructor" ($r=0.304$) was correlated.

Table 3

Correlation Between Students' Confidence at Last Class and Comments from the Instructor

	Comments from the instructor
Confidence at last class	.304(*)

* $P < .05$.

Discussion

The results of this study show that the majority of Japanese university students do not have many experiences of giving a speech in front of people; therefore, initially they get nervous. Figure 1 shows that many Japanese university students do not feel so nervous in giving a speech after taking a one-semester public speaking course. If students get more opportunities to speak in front of people, their nervousness level in giving speeches will decrease.

In this course, the instructor is a facilitator. Students will become aware of their own speech patterns by listening to and watching their speeches, analyzing them, and correcting their bad habits of speech so they can increase their speechmaking skills. This is student-centered instruction, and helps students become independent. However, a review of the results shows that the instructor's comments are very important to many students.

For this study, the instructor gave praising comments to all students after their first and second speech on purpose, because usually students are extremely nervous giving a first and second speech in front of people. From the experience of teaching this course for 5 years, the researcher found out that students are not ready to receive constructive comments from the instructor right after their first and second speeches. Most students think their speech was terrible and they feel embarrassed. The researcher believes that praising comments from the instructor right after their first two speeches made them gain confidence to give a speech in front of people. It is important to praise Japanese students because they are not used to getting praise or compliments. Many students are surprised to get praise from the instructor because they all think that they did not give a good speech. However, they are ready to receive constructive advice, as well as praise, from the instructor at the third speech.

Comments from the

the instructor
(*)

The instructor gives praise first and then gives constructive comments to students. Students commented that even though comments from their classmates are given anonymously, their classmates do not give direct honest advice points. Therefore, sometimes students think that the instructor is the only one who gives honest comments.

According to these research findings, when the instructor gave constructive and motivational comments after each speech, this was beneficial to students. Students felt that evaluation of their speeches by an instructor did help them gain confidence by the end of the course. Feedback from the instructor matters to students and they pay attention to the suggestions and increase their speech skills. When students work on their assignment, they have to listen to their speeches over and over at home and write down every word they said. It takes much longer than watching their speech. Students become aware of their own habits by listening to their own speech many times. For example, they identify mispronunciations, grammar mistakes, and the use of unnecessary words. They become aware of their bad habits and try not to repeat them. The researcher feels that this review helps students develop their speech skills. The instructor's feedback is very useful in motivating students to improve, so the instructor should develop ways to give effective feedback.

Conclusion

This research provides many hints to help educators design more effective public speaking courses in English. When the instructor gives constructive and motivational comments after each speech, this is beneficial to students.

It seems very important to praise students' speeches because each student has good points about their speech. The most important thing is to learn ways to deliver constructive advice to Japanese students. Some students pointed out that comments from classmates were very helpful, but even though these comments are anonymous, classmates do not write honest and direct advice points. It seems like this is coming from a valued Japanese cultural style and communication style that promotes indirectness -- people do not say things directly, they would rather speak indirectly. However, students said that the

instructor is the only one who does give honest and direct advice to students, and that really helped them.

The instructor and classmates should give honest, true, direct advice to speakers. Many Japanese people may think that it is rude to say things honestly, but students want to know what is good and what needs to be changed. Some students commented that it is hard to give a speech in front of people, so they do not want to make the same mistake over and over. They want to know what should be changed so they can give better presentations, and they do not want to feel embarrassed. Future research needs to look at more details of how students give comments to their peers after listening to their presentations.

Technology is fast developing and it will be a helpful and effective tool for instructors and students. These days, most students have a cell phone with them. When practicing their presentations in class, students recorded each other's presentations using their cell phones and evaluated their speech videos by watching them together. It is a very useful way to evaluate their practice speeches in class. Future research needs to look at more effects of students' self-evaluations by the use of technology.

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