

ENCOURAGING MULTIMEDIA AND DIGITAL LITERACY FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS IN RURAL JAPAN WITH PRESENTATIONS AND VIDEO EDITING

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to find effective and suitable methods of using technological advancements for the promotion and improvement of presentation skills and digital literacy through English as a foreign language (EFL) classes at a National Institute of Technology in Japan. The lower grade students at the college have mandatory group presentations that are worth a large portion of their final marks in their EFL classes. Individual presentations (or presentations in pairs) are preferable, but are only logistically possible with lower class sizes, which are often found in higher grade students (2nd & 3rd year university level). Students are encouraged to use PowerPoint or other media software to create presentations on explaining Japanese culture to foreign visitors. After having an orientation session on effective presentation techniques and being shown examples from previous years of backlog, students were essentially free to use their class time to work in their groups or individually in the computer lab or in class using their mobile devices or any other tablets or laptops they would bring with them for production. It was found through student survey feedback and interviews that most students did not feel very burdened by the task and hoped for more opportunities in making these kinds of presentations. The source of concern was that not all students were familiar with computer usage, let alone confident in developing a slideshow with PowerPoint. Students did not let their lack of comfort with computers stop them, and actually gained confidence through trial and error in their creations of presentations. Some groups even went as far to make YouTube videos in which they recreated a skit from within their textbooks, even without any previous experience in filming or video editing. Further improvements for the future would include recommended software available in the school computer labs, as not all students have access to their own computers or have mobile devices.

Keywords: *language education, student motivation, blended learning, computer assisted language learning (CALL), English as a foreign language (EFL)*

Introduction

National Institutes of Technology (NIT) are a series of colleges across Japan that are a combined high school and university, and like a vocational school jump into specialized subjects for their future fields of work early upon entrance. Due to this factor, general education subjects are often not a focus of teaching and more emphasis are put on mathematics, science, and specialized engineering subjects. However, one of the main goals of the NIT colleges are to foster future engineers that will be able to contribute on a global scale. Without significant training and exposure to the English language, and not just in specialized subjects and vocabulary, future graduates are known to struggle when they are sent overseas for work or research purposes.

Mandatory basics of vocabulary and grammar are taught in limited English classes, however the ability to develop communicative competence and comprehension of global issues regardless of their specialised fields are still lacking. Given the current state of the Web 2.0 era, students are often familiar with IoT and media regardless of their coursework. In hopes of linking the deeper learning and usage of English as a foreign language, giving the students a way to connect their everyday online selves in an educational EFL setting was the main goal of this research. By exposing students to an entertaining, yet educational way to collaborate their everyday media use with educational aspects was expected to encourage their intrinsic motivation to learn and use the language outside of classroom settings.

At the NIT college observed, students are required to make PowerPoint presentations for their final assignments at the end of the academic year, in which they are to introduce and explain a specific part of Japanese tradition and culture in English to foreign visitors to the college and their hometown. These presentation style assignments and activities are often shown to have great benefits to EFL learners, as detailed by Kawachi (2012) in her research, which even recommended more emphasis on presentations in future English curricula, a feeling often strongly agreed with.

However, seeing as a prepared slideshow may limit student creativity in their groups, a deeper and more detailed activity with more creative freedom was pursued. This led to student-centred digital storytelling through video skits being the next step in challenging the students to express themselves in the English language.

Pedagogy and Methods

The students were all informed from the start of the school year that their final assignments would be group presentations and be worth a quarter of their final marks. Upon first instruction, many first-year students were visibly flustered by the task that awaited. However, when second year students (who have been exposed to presenting the year before) were informed, the students were more excited about the assignment than before.

Given that the first-year students for the vast majority had little to no experience in presenting, let alone in English, an orientation session was given detailing what was recommended to focus on in the making of their presentations. These included the visual, physical and speech messages as the three main focal points. The visual focused on the slides, the physical on their posture, and speech on the actual English ability. This reassured students who were not confident in their pronunciation by knowing they can still get good marks if they worked hard in the other message sections.

Marking sheets were also shown and described in advance, so students knew how they would be evaluated. Five sections on a five-point scale were added to make a total which matched the percentage of their final marks the assignment was worth. In addition to the three main messages explained in class, students were also evaluated on memorization of the prepared scripts, as well as their responses in a post-presentation Q&A session. The evaluation of their responses was not solely on the answer itself (as questions presented were based on the presentation content and varied in difficulty level) but focused on the speed and accuracy of their answers. Stalling or discussing with teammates before answering would result in lower scores, whereas an instant albeit simple response would lead to a higher evaluation score.

	POOR	OK	GOOD	GREAT	EXCELLENT
VISUAL MESSAGE Slides, images, key points pointer use, key phrases, appealing to watch	1	2	3	4	5
PHYSICAL MESSAGE Posture, eye contact gestures, expression, confidence, appeal	1	2	3	4	5
SPEECH MESSAGE Speech content, logic, grammar, pronunciation, easy to understand	1	2	3	4	5
MEMORIZATION No reading of script, not depending on slides or visual cues to talk	1	2	3	4	5
QUESTIONS & ANSWERS Speed and accuracy of response, no stalling or overthinking answers	1	2	3	4	5
FINAL MARK	OVERALL COMMENTS				
/ 25					

Figure 1, Evaluation Sheet for Oral Presentations

As seen in the evaluation sheet in Figure 1, the five-point scales did not have a zero-point option, as just going up and confronting their fears would be worth at least one point, or in total five (or a 20 percent score just by participating). The only way to obtain a zero would be not contributing in that aspect, such as not answering a question, not having a speaking role in their group, or having an unexcused absence on the day of presenting.

For second year students, instead of making them do the exact same presentation assignment, the students were instructed to make an original video skit based on the content of one of the units covered in the textbook used throughout the year. The second-year students were visibly shocked by the assignment, as very few of them had experience or even interest in video editing, let alone acting and having it seen and evaluated by others.

Throughout the year, students were exposed to short snippets of North American dramas, and an original drama series included in the textbook that went along with the content of their studies. Having a small yet constant example of what would be expected of the students in the end was a suitable parallel which the groups would be able to mimic in their editing efforts.

	POOR	OK	GOOD	GREAT	EXCELLENT
VISUAL MESSAGE Video & sound quality, subtitles (if included), easy to follow along	1	2	3	4	5
PHYSICAL MESSAGE Posture, eye contact gestures, expression, confidence, appeal	1	2	3	4	5
SPEECH MESSAGE Speech content, logic grammar, pronunciation, fluidity, no reading script	1	2	3	4	5
PRODUCTION & EFFORT Was there balance in the team members & visible effort in quality filming?	1	2	3	4	5
SUITABILITY & INTEREST Does the content reflect what the unit was about? Is it ok to watch in class?	1	2	3	4	5
FINAL MARK	OVERALL COMMENTS				
/ 25					

Figure 2, Evaluation Sheet for Short Skit Films

As seen in Figure 2, the evaluation sheets were again shown and discussed in advance, and focused on the same three messages, but instead of memorization and Q&A, included the production and effort as well as suitability and interest as part of their marks. This was to reassure that the content would be family-friendly and can be shown in class in following years as examples, and that students would aim for higher quality final products as they were shown throughout the year in other dramas.

Although the school did not provide any video editing software, or even materials to film with, most students already owned smartphones, tablets or their own personal computers and were encouraged to bring and use them during presentation preparation time to film, edit and develop their skits. With smartphones being the gadget of choice, most students did spend money on video editing apps and software which was not a requirement.

Most student groups spent the most time on their scripts and storyboards, with filming usually finishing in one class period and the rest of the time spent on editing. Some groups even went as far to put up teaser trailers of their presentations on social media to build up the hype of their work, which was a pleasant surprise and added a rivalry-like friendly pressure to the other groups.

Results and Discussion

The main underlying goal of these presentation assignments is to encourage students to feel comfortable in speaking in English in front of other people. This in turn can influence the confidence the students have in their abilities and increase intrinsic motivation in furthering their linguistic development. As also detailed in similar work by Yamamoto (2018), students often do not have previous experience in presenting, as initially suspected, with student even detailing that they have not even had the opportunity to present in Japanese before. This is a source of concern in many ways, as developing a fundamental linguistic skill before doing so in the users native language can lead to confusion. However, most students were satisfied by the final products and felt encouraged to challenge themselves more.

In terms of marks, a vast majority of students got the necessary passing mark of over 60, with most getting over 80 as well. The only failing marks seen were when students submitted an unfinished project or submitted past the designated deadline. These groups of students were also seen to have not developed their group discussions very effectively during class time, and despite repeated checking and reassurance by the instructors in class, were never fully able to switch their efforts into full gear to create a successful group effort.

Another study by Hensley in 2009, students were able to create virtual portfolios of their work and be able to see and compare with others. Given that the study is a decade ago, it is something that was very much before its time and a very interesting field in current media study. The only concern, which was also met with the students observed in this study, is the permission and privacy for the students to share their work. Almost all students did not feel comfortable uploading their content to YouTube or other video sharing sites for fears of others seeing their work and leaving bad comments or other negative actions in regards to their hard work and efforts. Unlisted videos were suggested, but students also rejected that idea in the submissions and just brought USBs with video data instead.

Future endeavours in both the first-year presentations and second-year video skits will push for an open, online component with permission forms being an option to help encourage safety and security of the students content. It

is ideal for the instructor to create an open, online database of students work that can be seen and shared, and even used as reference for future cohorts in the further development and refining of their presentation materials. This database can also have students look back on their works years later, as seen a lot by students before graduation (due to assumed nostalgia).

Conclusions

Based on the surprising quality of the video materials produced by the second graders in their final skits, the positive influence of showing native media in class on student presentation skills, and the high levels of intrinsic motivation seen in students on these assignments show that it is a positive constructivist learning experience. Although some students complained that it was difficult in terms of editing and getting it to the quality that they desired, the students reflected on it still being an innovative event in which they wanted to delve into further on their own time and out of class correlation.

The results were similar to those discovered by Smithers & Matsuo (2018) in which students depended mostly on smartphones as opposed to computers, and felt more creative freedom in making videos over PowerPoint presentations, and felt greater freedom in creation and increased intrinsic motivation thanks to their efforts throughout these activities.

Due to these assignments being marked and part of the student final results in class, some students admitted to paying out-of-pocket for video editing programs and software to ensure high quality production. If schools were able to provide a common program (like iMovie) in which students had free and easy access to, it would spare the students these personal expenses, have students on the same playing field, and lead to more fair evaluation.

Although no technical training was provided in class for video editing technique, students were able to reflect from their first year presentation instructions to have a solid base regardless.

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