

The Influence of Past Experience of International Communication on Students' Perceptions Relating to Making Presentations in English

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to investigate students' perceptions relating to making a presentation in English. Students were asked to complete a survey in advance of making a presentation and then they were asked to complete a similar survey after having made the presentation. The responses to the pre-survey and the post-survey were compared for evidence of changes in students' perceptions before and after making the presentation, and also for evidence of differences in perceptions between students who had experience of international communication from having visited an English speaking country and those who had not. The results show that students rated the challenges involved in making a presentation in English as being more difficult in advance, and that overall, students who had visited an English speaking country were more inclined to rate presentation tasks as being less difficult. The study concludes that past experience of international communication has a positive effect on self-confidence.

Keywords: English presentations, international communication, pre- and post-survey

1 Introduction

Fujita et al. (2009) used a pre-and post-survey to assess the effectiveness of an English presentation course at Tokyo Keizai University. This paper considers the results of a similar pre- and post-survey regarding presentations and discusses the influence of past experience of international communication, specifically time spent in a country where English is the first language, on students' perceptions relating to making a presentation in English.

2 Background

2.1 Presentations in English

First year students in the Department of Intercultural Studies at Yamaguchi Prefectural University (YPU) all take the Advanced English I course and take two ninety-minute classes each week. Students are separated into three classes based on their TOEIC score achieved in a test taken immediately after joining the university. Students scoring over 450 points in the April TOEIC test join the Advanced English Ia class. The students who were the subjects for this study were all members of Advanced English Ia and therefore all had a TOEIC score in excess of 450 points at the time of the survey. The Advanced English course focuses on developing reading and writing skills in English and students are given no specific instruction in how to make presentations in English.

The task set for the class in this case was to make a one minute presentation in English accompanied by three PowerPoint slides. The topic for the presentation was for students to make a personal connection with one of the ten Oxford Bookworms readers which the students had read, one book each week, over the course of the semester. After the students had read each book they discussed it in class in the following week, with each student in a group of five or six taking one of six roles (discussion leader, summarizer, connector, word master, passage person, and culture collector) in a reading circle discussion (Furr, 2011). These roles were rotated around the group in the following weeks until each student had taken each of the six roles. For the purposes of the presentation in this case, each student was

required to perform the role of 'connector'.

The role of the connector in the reading circle discussion is to inform the group of an emotional connection with the story or a personal memory related to the story. When students were first introduced to the concept of reading circles they were given some general advice about the requirements for each role in the reading circle discussion. In preparation for taking the role of 'connector', students were instructed to find something about the story which related to their own experience. If a student decided that the events and content of the story were beyond the realms of their experience, they were asked to imagine a situation in which they might experience the same emotions as one of the characters in the story.

Students were given no advice regarding how to make a presentation, however due to the reading circle roles having been rotated around each group, each student should have experienced taking the role of connector in a reading circle discussion on at least two occasions during the semester. In addition, students should have experienced listening to other students make a personal connection with a story, eight or nine times. Students were given a copy of YPU's multilingual presentation textbook "Plus Alpha – Multilingual Presentations" (Kim & Morihara, 2015) and advised that it would be beneficial for them to study the guidelines for making a presentation in English as discussed in the textbook. Students were also given the opportunity to discuss their presentation with Canadian international exchange students studying at YPU.

3 Method

3.1 Pre-Presentation Survey

Students were informed of their task two weeks in advance of the day fixed for making the presentations. On the same day, also two weeks before the presentations, students were asked to complete a pre-survey to elicit background information and to assess their predictions relating to giving a presentation in English. The survey was conducted in Japanese.

Students were asked whether they had ever visited an English speaking country. In the case of an affirmative response, students were asked about the number of times they had done so, the length of time they had spent in the country, and their age at the time of the visit. Students were then asked whether they had any experience of making a presentation in a foreign language, and to give some details about their experience. Finally, students were asked about their feelings regarding making a presentation in English. A 4-point Likert scale (1 = not at all challenging, to 4 = very challenging), as shown below, was used to categorize the students' responses.

4. Very challenging
3. A little challenging
2. Not very challenging
1. Not at all challenging

Students were asked to select an answer choice which matched their feelings in relation to the following questions.

1. Thinking about the content will be...
2. Making my English easy to understand will be...
3. Writing a presentation in English will be...
4. Translating unknown words into English will be...
5. Writing Japanese expressions in English will be...
6. Pronouncing English words clearly will be...
7. Making other people understand my English will be...
8. Remembering the script for my presentation will be...

3.2 Post-Presentation Survey

Immediately after the students had finished making their presentation to the class, they were asked to complete a post-survey in which all of the questions shown above were framed in the past tense. The same 4-point Likert scale was used for the post-survey as had been used for the pre-survey.

1. Thinking about the content was...
2. Making my English easy to understand was...
3. Writing a presentation in English was...
4. Translating unknown words into English was...
5. Writing Japanese expressions in English was...
6. Pronouncing English words clearly was...
7. Making other people understand my English was...
8. Remembering the script for my presentation was...

4 Results

Table 1 compares students' answers from the pre- and post-surveys. The results of paired t-test analyses show that "3. Writing a presentation in English" and "5. Writing Japanese expressions in English" differed significantly and decreased in the post-survey. The other categories did not display significant differences; however, the average scores for the post-survey decreased. This result suggests that, even without specific training or instruction, students found that making a presentation in English was not as difficult as they had imagined it would be in advance.

Table 1: Average scores for statements before and after the presentation

Question	Pre-survey	Post-survey	Increase/Decrease
1. Thinking about the content	2.95	2.45	Decrease
2. Making my English easy to understand	3.05	2.73	Decrease
3. Writing a presentation in English	3.14	2.59	Decrease
4. Translating unknown words into English	3.00	2.50	Decrease
5. Writing Japanese expressions in English	3.59	2.91	Decrease
6. Pronouncing English words clearly	2.64	2.41	Decrease
7. Making other people understand my English	3.00	2.91	Decrease
8. Remembering the script for my presentation	2.64	2.95	Increase

Data was also examined for any indications of differences between students who had experience of international communication from having visited an English speaking country (ESC), and those who had not done so (Table 2). The class of 28 students was split equally between 14 students who had visited an ESC and 14 students who had not.

Table 2: Experience of visiting an English speaking country

Students who had visited an ESC*	Students who had not visited an ESC
14	14

*ESC: English speaking country

As shown in table 3 and table 4, for both groups, the students' perception of the difficulty of making a presentation in English agreed with the data for the class as a whole in that students believed that the task would be more challenging than they subsequently found it to be.

Table 3: Average scores for students who had visited an English speaking country

Question	Pre-survey	Post-survey	Increase/Decrease
1. Thinking about the content	2.93	2.71	Decrease
2. Making my English easy to understand	3.00	2.64	Decrease
3. Writing a presentation in English	2.93	2.57	Decrease
4. Translating unknown words into English	2.86	2.57	Decrease
5. Writing Japanese expressions in English	3.29	3.00	Decrease
6. Pronouncing English words clearly	2.79	2.64	Decrease
7. Making other people understand my English	2.93	2.93	Same
8. Remembering the script for my presentation	2.57	3.21	Increase

Table 4: Average scores for students who had not visited an English speaking country

Question	Pre-survey	Post-survey	Increase/Decrease
1. Thinking about the content	2.93	2.71	Decrease
2. Making my English easy to understand	3.07	2.86	Decrease
3. Writing a presentation in English	3.43	3.00	Decrease
4. Translating unknown words into English	3.00	2.79	Decrease
5. Writing Japanese expressions in English	3.86	3.07	Decrease
6. Pronouncing English words clearly	2.71	2.43	Decrease
7. Making other people understand my English	3.14	3.00	Decrease
8. Remembering the script for my presentation	2.93	3.00	Increase

However, when the data for the two groups is juxtaposed, as shown in table 5, a different picture emerges. With the exception of perceptions relating to the difficulty of pronunciation, and the challenge of thinking about the content of the presentation, students who had experience of visiting an ESC perceived every task as being potentially less challenging in advance of making the presentation.

Table 5: Pre-survey results classified according to experience of visiting an English speaking country

Question	Visited ESC*	Never visited ESC	Higher value
1. Thinking about the content	2.93	2.93	Same
2. Making my English easy to understand	3.00	3.07	Never visited ESC
3. Writing a presentation in English	2.93	3.43	Never visited ESC
4. Translating unknown words into English	2.86	3.00	Never visited ESC
5. Writing Japanese expressions in English	3.29	3.86	Never visited ESC
6. Pronouncing English words clearly	2.79	2.71	Visited ESC
7. Making other people understand my English	2.93	3.14	Never visited ESC
8. Remembering the script for my presentation	2.57	2.93	Never visited ESC

*ESC = English speaking country

The survey carried out after the presentation showed a similar trend. As shown in table 6, both students who had visited an ESC, and students who had never visited an ESC, considered that thinking about the content of the presentation had been equally difficult. Students who had visited an ESC thought that pronouncing English words clearly and remembering the script for the presentation had been more difficult than did students who had never visited an ESC. However, for five of the eight categories, it was students who had never visited an ESC who considered the various tasks to have been more difficult. Interestingly, the five categories in question are more concerned with communicative and linguistic aspects rather than practical aspects, such as thinking about content or remembering the script.

Table 6: Post-survey results classified according to experience of visiting an English speaking country

Question	Visited ESC*	Never visited ESC	Higher value
1. Thinking about the content	2.71	2.71	Same
2. Making my English easy to understand	2.64	2.86	Never visited ESC
3. Writing a presentation in English	2.57	3.00	Never visited ESC
4. Translating unknown words into English	2.57	2.79	Never visited ESC
5. Writing Japanese expressions in English	3.00	3.07	Never visited ESC
6. Pronouncing English words clearly	2.64	2.43	Visited ESC
7. Making other people understand my English	2.93	3.00	Never visited ESC
8. Remembering the script for my presentation	3.21	3.00	Visited ESC

*ESC = English speaking country

The April TOEIC scores for the two sets of students were also compared. As shown in table 7, the average score for the 14 students who had visited an ESC was slightly higher, at 542.5, compared against 535.4 for students who had not visited an ESC.

Table 7: April 2016 TOEIC scores

Visited ESC	Never visited ESC
510	455
635	545
495	610
560	520
550	465
550	525
765	530
565	520
450	520
505	460
525	500
455	785
520	515
510	545
Total 7595	Total 7495
Average TOEIC score: 542.5	Average TOEIC score: 535.4

While recognizing that the sample of 28 students used as the subjects for this survey is a small sample number, the results of the survey appear to indicate that past experience of international communication, in the form of a visit to an ESC has positive outcomes in terms of greater confidence in facing the perceived challenges of making a presentation in English. However, the data relating to TOEIC scores is inconclusive and could indicate that the simple fact of having visited an ESC is not in itself a signal foretelling superior performance in a TOEIC test.

5 Discussion

The objective of Fujita et al. (2009) in conducting a pre- and post-survey was to assess the effectiveness of an English presentation course and the study concluded that such courses have positive educational outcomes including students gaining more self-confidence. The present study also used a pre- and post-survey but with the objective of eliciting differences between students' perceptions of the difficulty of presentation related tasks, and also to compare data between students with or without experience of visiting an ESC.

A large number of studies have been conducted concerning the beneficial educational outcomes of study abroad. For example, Sutton and Rubin (2004) reported that American college students who had studied abroad during their time at college showed greater functional knowledge, knowledge of world geography, knowledge of cultural relativism, and knowledge of global interdependence. Meanwhile, the website of Study International (S I News, 2016) reports on the findings in a British Council study (Broadening Horizons, 2016) indicating that amongst the benefits of study overseas are “improved communication skills and heightened confidence levels”. However, in the current study reported here, the subjects were all first year undergraduates, so any experience of visiting an ESC was limited to their life before arrival at university.

According to research published on a website (Explorica, 2011), 67% of people who have had the experience of participating in educational travel between the ages of 12 and 18 proceed to higher education and graduate from university, while only 34% of people who have no experience of educational travel between those ages eventually graduate from college. This suggests that overseas experience in advance of university study has a beneficial long-term effect on students. In addition to this, it has been reported (Morita, 2010) that a short-term study of as little as two weeks can result in significant changes in university students' language learning strategies.

6 Conclusions

Overall the results of this study suggest that students who have experience of traveling to an ESC feel more confident about accomplishing tasks in English than students who have not had such an experience.

The consistent area of difference between the two groups was that students who had visited an ESC rated the difficulty of ‘pronouncing English words clearly’ as being more challenging than students who had not been to an ESC. This was the case in both the pre-presentation survey and also in the post-presentation survey. This can be interpreted as showing that students who have had more experience of trying to communicate with native speakers of English are more aware of communication problems resulting from poor pronunciation. On the contrary, students who have not directly experienced communication problems connected with pronunciation in an ESC may be inclined to underestimate this aspect of communication.

The only category for which the average score increased in the post-presentation survey was that of ‘remembering the script for my presentation’. This could be a hint that teachers need to give students advice on strategies for memorizing information, especially as this could have applications to vocabulary learning.

It was revealing that both groups of students rated the tasks involved in making a presentation as being more challenging in advance of the presentation, rather than the other way round. This indicates that teachers should be more proactive in telling students to learn from their experiences. As students develop their communication skills in English they need to be reminded that the completion of any task is often not as challenging as it first appears.

The present survey was conducted using a limited set of subjects, so the conclusions noted here are only tentative. However, the results of the survey overall showed that students who had previous experience of international communication in the form of making a visit to an ESC perceived presentation tasks as being less challenging. This agrees with other studies which report a positive link between study overseas, self-confidence and improved academic outcomes.

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