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Raymond LEVY

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A Case Study on the Number of Feedback Items in an EFL Presentation Class

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The study of feedback in EFL presentation classes is slowly expanding, but one area that has not been receiving attention has been whether or not the amount of feedback has any effect on learners' grades. This study tracks learners' grades as well as the amount of feedback items they receive on specific criteria over the course of the semester and evaluates the changes of the grades relative to the number of comments in an attempt to determine a correlation. The results indicate that no such trend exists, but students felt that the giving and receiving of comments was worthwhile.

Keywords : presentation, teacher feedback, student feedback, grades, comments

Introduction

Teacher and peer assessment being conducted simultaneously has been found to have positive results in oral activities and presentations executed in EFL classrooms¹⁾. It can increase student motivation to improve their presentations²⁾, while at the same time can also be a useful tool for fostering a positive relationship between the student and teacher³⁾. Despite the increased attention being given to the study of feedback in EFL presentations, there remains many factors left to be examined concerning its effectiveness.

It has been shown that students enjoy receiving feedback from their peers⁴⁾ as well as their teachers⁵⁾. A question that remains is just how much feedback a student should receive in order

for a change in their marks to be seen. The subjects of previous studies concerning EFL presentation feedback have ranged in number from as few as six to nearly 100 subjects, but little mention has been made of how many comments each individual subject received. Moreover, tracking the changes of students' marks over time has also not been properly scrutinized to gauge the effectiveness of the comments. This study will examine quantity rather than quality in order to determine whether the number of comments has any impact on students' presentation marks.

Background

Otoshi and Heffernan draw from other studies in stating that "A combination of teacher-, peer-, and self-evaluation seems to yield the most successful results" for learners in EFL classrooms⁶⁾. This evaluation can be delivered through a number of methods, two of which are oral and written

1 鳥取短期大学国際文化交流学科

feedback. Cheng and Warren found that students has positive attitudes and performance as a result of written peer-evaluation⁷. The study done by Van Houten, Hill, and Parsons showed that both oral and written feedback from teachers also improved student performance⁸.

Lipnevich and Smith conducted a study on the effects of several forms of feedback on student performance, including the giving of grades⁹. They list five main functions that grades serve as first stated by Airasian¹⁰, of these two – feedback and motivation – are relevant to this study. First, feedback provides students with information about what they are doing correctly or incorrectly, often times aspects that the evaluated students may not be able to identify themselves. Second, motivation pushes students to use feedback, among other factors, to try harder and improve subsequent efforts. They conclude that “grading is not supportive of its use in facilitating learning”, and indeed, their own study found feedback consisting of grades and comments led to significantly lower improvement than comments alone.

Despite the studies done on the various forms of feedback, there is a missing segment in the researching dealing with how many individual comments or items of feedback each student received. A student receiving feedback from only one source may not fully comprehend the message’s intent and would also have no basis for comparison to other sources (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Furthermore, it remains to be seen whether there is a significant number of comments which, when reached, would have an influence on students’ grades.

Students in the study done by Shimo¹¹ prepared and delivered several presentations over the course of a semester and received feedback

throughout the course of their class. They felt that rehearsing their presentations to be important. What was not expressed was how their marks changed over the course of the semester and whether their rehearsing had any impact on their final grades. The missing areas in this and other studies leads to the focus of this paper: how students’ grade change over time as a result of the number of items of feedback they receive.

Class Structure

In order to provide an appropriate context for understanding how the data were explained, collected, and evaluated, a brief summary of the course that was the setting for the study will be provided.

Speech and Discussion is a second-year elective course taught by the college’s foreign national instructor. The class meets once a week for 90 minutes for a total of fifteen weeks. The course’s objective is for students to “be presented with the opportunity to develop, exchange and present ideas. Students ... practice ways to form their own ideas and organize them properly.”

Class One: Students are introduced to the presentation-making process. In pairs, students survey one another using model questions in order to get them thinking about themselves and their personalities. Students are then shown the steps of making and delivering a presentation (choosing a topic; brainstorming; organizing topics into an introduction, a body, and a conclusion; strong first and last sentences; making note cards; practicing) and go through an example presentation from start to finish together. Effective presentation techniques (using gestures, maintaining good posture, making eye contact,

managing anxiety, and projecting voice) are discussed. Finally, the students brainstorm and organize topics for a one-minute presentation about themselves, and are asked to finish organizing for homework.

Class Two: Students review listening skills as audience members. Using their completed outlines, the students are shown how to make notes and practice their presentations. The teacher instructs students to listen attentively to presentations and provide written feedback for each student after the student has finished presenting. At this stage, the students are not instructed to watch for anything in particular – simply to note what they found to be effective and admirable, or needing improvement about the presentation. The assembled feedback is compiled and distributed to students in the next class. As well, after the students have finished speaking, the teacher delivers general comments on what was overall effective and what was needing improvement.

From Class Three onwards, students followed a formula of thinking about a chosen topic using pair and group activities, brainstorming and organizing presentation ideas about the topic with the assistance of examples, learning about different ways of how to begin and end presentations, and focusing on refining the following presentation techniques: making effective note cards, eye contact, gestures, posture, voice stress and volume.

The entire process took two classes of instruction, practice, and preparation, with presentations being made at the beginning of the following class, for a total of 2.5 classes per unit. Four units were completed over the course of the semester: A Good Friend, A Favorite Place, A Prized Possession, and A Memorable Experience.

The final two classes considered how to pose a

question as an audience member, and how to answer questions as a presenter. Students used the final class to prepare for the final presentation on a topic chosen individually and presented as a final examination during the examination period at the end of the semester.

Participants

There were seven junior college (2 years of study) students involved in this study, all majoring in Intercultural Communication and all native speakers of Japanese. Originally, there was an eighth student registered in the class, but the student retired midway through the semester; their scores have not been included in the study.

Procedure

An evaluation form was created by the instructor for use by both students and the instructor to evaluate presentations. The form was comprised of 8 criteria as well as a section for written comments. The criteria were: organization, attitude, posture, voice, eye contact, gestures, explanation, and preparation. The first and seventh criteria have to do with the content of the presentation, while the remainder focused on the delivery. The criteria were graded on a four-point numerical scale from 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest score and 4 being the highest. Half marks were permitted.

Students were instructed to only provide written comments for Presentation 1 in Class Two. Despite having practiced all criteria in the first class, the students were instructed to score organization, attitude, eye contact, explanation, and preparation as well as provide written

comments for Presentation 2 in Class Five.

Gestures were a focus of practice before Presentation 3 and it was added to the previous list of criteria, with students being given special instruction immediately prior to the presentation to focus on this criterion when scoring in Class Eight. Finally, voice and gestures were the focus of practice before Presentation 4 and were added to the previous criteria list, again with students being given special instruction immediately prior to the presentation to focus on these two criteria when scoring this time. The scoring for Presentations 5 and 6 as well as the final presentation performed after the semester had finished as a final exam followed the scoring scheme as Presentation 4, but without any special instruction to focus on any particular criterion.

Methodology

Microsoft Excel (2013) was used for data analysis. The mean peer and teacher scores were calculated. Next, a regression analysis was performed between the number of comments received and the grade received for the subsequent presentation for each item. Finally, a survey was administered with the purpose of asking students their opinions about the class’s use of feedback. It was conducted after the semester had ended and after the final presentation was completed. The survey was anonymous; students were told before receiving the survey that it would in no way affect their marks in the class and the teacher left the room while the students responded.

Results

Students’ mean scores and number of comments received concerning the Posture, Gestures, and Voice criteria were presented in the manner of Table 1 shown below. Student #4’s peer-evaluation results are shown in Table 1 as an example. Presentation 1 was not included because no scores were to have been entered; only written comments. Although scores for the three criteria were not to have been entered for Presentation 2, some students gave written comments nevertheless. These have been included to aid in the regression analysis performed to determine whether these comments (or lack thereof) had an effect on Presentation 3. The regression analysis looked for a correlation between the number of comments for criterion and the mark for that criterion on the next presentation, as indicated by the dashed arrow in the example.

Each student’s marks and received comments are summarized below. Both student-evaluates scores and teacher-evaluated scores will be discussed one after the other. The significance of

Table 1. Example of mean peer-evaluated scores for Presentations 2 to Final

Student #4					
Scores	Pres. #2	Pres. #3	Pres. #4	Pres. #5	Final
Posture	N/A	3 ↗	3.6... ↘	3.2 ↗	3.3...
Gestures	N/A	3.6 ↘	3.3... ↘	3 ↗	3.5
Voice	N/A	N/A	3.83... ↘	3.6 ↗	3.6...
Comments					
Posture	0	1	0	0	0
Gestures	1	0	1	0	0
Voice	0	1	3	0	0

their regression results will also be introduced.

Student # 1: From the other students' marks/comments, Student #1's posture scores increased for Presentations 4 and 5, but decreased for the final presentation. No comments for Posture were received. After receiving comments for Gestures, the score rose for Presentation 4, but fell for Presentation 5 despite receiving a comment. The score rose again for the final despite receiving no comment on Presentation 5. Voice scores rose when comments were received and fell when no comment was received.

From the teacher's marks/comments, Student #1's posture scores remained constant from Presentation 3 to 4 after receiving a comment, fell, then rose. Gesture scores rose, fell, and then rose again with no comments received. Voice scores rose after no comments, and rose again after two comments.

Finally, there appears to be some correlation of comments received and the scores on the next presentation for Gestures ($r^2=0.40$) and Voice ($r^2=0.31$).

Student # 2: From the other students' marks/comments, Student #2's posture scores remained constant from Presentation 3 to 4, then fell for Presentation 5 before rising again for the final. Scores for Gesture rose, remained constant, then fell. No comments for Posture or Gesture were received. Voice scores fell after receiving a comment, then rose after receiving a comment.

From the teacher's marks/comments, Student #2's posture scores rose, fell, then rose after receiving a comment. Gesture scores rose after receiving a comment, fell after receiving no comment, and then remained constant from Presentation 5 to the final presentation after receiving a comment. Voice scores were constant

from Presentation 4 to 5 after receiving a comment, and rose after receiving two comments.

Finally, there appears to be some correlation of comments received and the scores on the next presentation for Voice ($r^2=0.42$).

Student # 3: From the other students' marks/comments, Student #3's posture scores rose, fell, and then rose again. No comments for Posture were received. Likewise, Gesture scores rose, fell, and then rose again, however a comment was received before the score fell. Voice scores fell after receiving comments, then rose after receiving no comments.

From the teacher's marks/comments, Student #3's posture scores rose after receiving a comment, fell after receiving a comment, and then remained constant from Presentation 5 to the final presentation after receiving a comment. Gesture scores rose then fell with no comments, then rose after receiving a comment. Voice scores rose after no comments, then remained constant from Presentation 5 to the final presentation after receiving a comment.

Finally, the correlation of comments received and the scores on the next presentation was very weak.

Student # 4: From the other students' marks/comments, Student #4's posture scores rose, fell, and then rose again. A comment was received before the score rose the first time. Gesture scores fell for Presentations 4 and 5 before rising for the final. A comment was received before the falling Presentation 5 score. Voice scores fell after receiving three comments, then rose for the final after receiving no comments.

From the teacher's marks/comments, Student #4's posture scores fell after a comment, remained constant from Presentation 4 to 5 after a comment,

and then rose with a comment. Gesture scores fell with no comment, remained constant from Presentation 4 to 5 with a comment, and remained constant from Presentation 5 to the final presentation with no comment. Voice scores fell then rose, both after receiving a comment.

Finally, the correlation of comments received and the scores on the next presentation was very weak.

Student # 5: From the other students' marks/comments, Student #5's posture scores rose after Presentation 3, remained constant from Presentation 4 to 5, and fell for the final. Gesture scores rose, fell, and then rose again. No comments for Posture or Gesture were received. Voice scores rose after receiving a comment, and rose again after receiving no comment.

From the teacher's marks/comments, Student #5's posture scores were constant from Presentations 3 to 4 to 5, then rose for the final presentation, all without receiving a comment. Gesture scores fell, rose, and then fell again, all after receiving a comment. Voice scores rose twice, both times after receiving comments.

Finally, the correlation of comments received and the scores on the next presentation was very weak.

Student # 6: From the other students' marks/comments, Student #6's posture score rose from Presentations 3 to 4 to 5, and fell for the final. Gestures scores rose after Presentation 3, then rose for the final three presentations. No comments for Posture or Gesture were received. Voice scores fell after receiving a comment, then rose after receiving no comment.

From the teacher's marks/comments, Student #6's posture score rose then fell without receiving comments, then rose again after receiving a

comment. Gesture scores rose after receiving a comment, then remained constant from Presentation 4 to 5 to the final presentation, first after receiving a comment, then after receiving no comment.

Finally, the correlation of comments received and the scores on the next presentation was very weak.

Student # 7: From the other students' marks/comments, Student #7's posture score rose from Presentation 3 to 4, remained constant to Presentation 5, and fell for the final. No Posture comments were received. Gesture scores rose after receiving a comment, fell after receiving a comment, and rose again after receiving no comment. Voice scores fell after receiving no comments, and fell again after receiving several comments.

From the teacher's marks/comments, Student #7's posture score remained constant from Presentation 3 to 4 after receiving a comment, rose after receiving a comment, and finally remained constant from Presentation 5 to the final presentation after receiving no comment. Gesture scores rose with no comment, fell after a comment, and then rose again after no comment. Voice scores were constant from Presentation 4 to 5 to the final presentation, once after receiving no comments and then next receiving two comments.

Finally, there appears to be a fairly strong correlation of comments received and the scores on the next presentation for Voice ($r^2=0.57$).

Discussion

When evaluating the comments left for Posture and Gestures from Presentation 2 onwards, and Posture, Gestures and Voice from Presentation 3

onwards, of the 154 total items possible, 47 items received at least one comment (42%). Of these, one comment for an item resulted in the mark for that item increasing on the subsequent presentation 44.7% of the time, decreasing 31.6% of the time, and no change 23.7% of the time. Single comments were left for 35 of the 47 items. For two comments, these figures change to 57.1% for increasing, 14.3% for decreasing, and 28.6% for no change. Double comments were left for seven of the 47 items. For three comments, the figures are 0% for increasing and no change, and 100% for decreasing. Triple comments were left only twice.

Of note is that when zero comments were left, the mark for that item increasing on the subsequent presentation occurred 53.8% of the time, decreasing occurred 29.2% of the time, and no change occurred 16.9% of the time (Note: Percentages do not add to 100% due to rounding). Thus, marks increased most frequently when no comments were left for students, decreased most frequently when one comment was left (if the 2-3-comment score is ignored), and no change was most frequently seen when two comments were given.

Moving from no comments to one comment shows a falling number of increased marks and a rising number of decreased and no change marks. However, the trend does not appear to continue when increasing the number of comments from one to two: there is a rising number of increased marks as well as no change marks, and a decreasing number of decreased marks. This lack of a trend appears to be further corroborated by the regression results. Only three of seven students had items that showed a correlation of comments received and the scores on the next presentation. Of those three, no students showed a

correlation for all of their items, and only one student had an item that showed a fairly strong correlation (Student #7's Voice marks).

Despite the apparent lack of a trend between the number of comments and subsequent marks, students indicated that they found the feedback activity to be a useful exercise. From the survey given to students after the class was concluded, all seven students found feedback from the teacher and other students to be either helpful or very helpful. Although students were split on finding giving feedback to be easy or difficult (Figure 1), they all seemed to understand the feedback that they had received.

Otoshi and Heffernen (Otoshi & Heffernen, 2008) make note in their study of EFL presentations of learners needing to be aware of the criteria they are grading and being graded

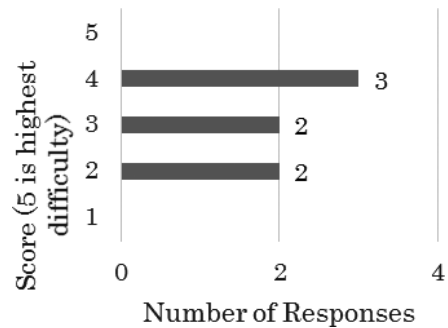


Figure 1. Did you find it difficult to critically evaluate another student's presentation?

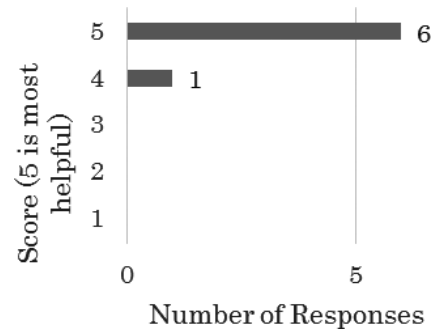


Figure 2. Did you find the feedback received from the teacher helpful when preparing for your presentations?

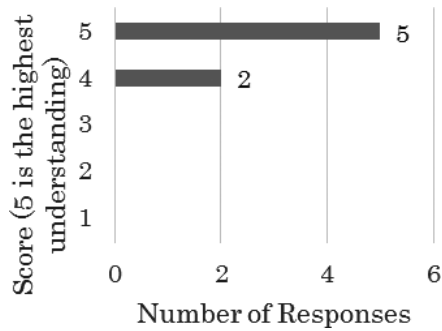


Figure 3. Did you understand the feedback received from other students and the teacher?

upon. This understanding appears to have led to students making an effort to incorporate the received feedback into subsequent presentations (Figures 2 and 3).

Finally, students felt that their overall presentation skills improved to some degree. This is reported even as the data shows that students' marks improved only about half of the time. It could be that students felt that other areas of their presentation skills unrelated to the three studied criteria improved.

Conclusion

Several implications can be drawn from the data. First, there does not seem to be a trend or pattern for the relationship between the number of comments received and students' presentation marks. Second, an interesting result was students' marks improving the most when receiving no feedback about their previous performance regarding specific items. The reason for this is not clear, especially since students self-reported that they not only valued feedback but also tried to improve their presentations from it. Third, students felt their presentation performances improve even though they did not receive feedback on the three criteria 58% of the time.

They may be a gap present between where students believe their skills to be and their graded results.

This study acknowledges that the small number of students together with the relatively small number of comments may not adequately be able to account for the lack of a trend. Future studies should make an effort to increase both. Also, future researchers can examine how student make an effort to incorporate received feedback into their presentations and the specific preparation activities involved. As Shimo (Shimo, 2011) indicated, students understand the importance of practicing the presentations. Thus, there may be merit in seeing the kinds of activities learners use to get ready, all the more so if there is a relationship between how much effort they spend to prepare and the amount of feedback they subsequently receive.

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Appendix

End of Semester Student Survey about Speech & Discussion

This survey is to find out how the student scorecards and feedback used in the class has helped your presentation skills, and whether or not the approach has an effect on English presentation skills. Your answers are confidential and will only be used as research findings for academic purposes and will not impact in any way on your final grades.

Directions: Please state your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following questions. Circle the appropriate number.

1. Have you had experience with giving or receiving presentation feedback before?
A lot of experience 5 4 3 2 1 No experience at all

2. Did you find it difficult to critically evaluate another student's presentation?
Very difficult 5 4 3 2 1 Not difficult at all

3. Did you find the feedback received from other students helpful when preparing for your presentations?
Very helpful 5 4 3 2 1 Not helpful at all

4. Did you find the feedback received from the teacher helpful when preparing for your presentations?
Very helpful 5 4 3 2 1 Not helpful at all

5. Did you understand the feedback received from other students and the teacher?
Understood 5 4 3 2 1 Did not understand at all

6. Did you make an effort to incorporate the feedback received from other students into your next presentation?
Made great effort 5 4 3 2 1 Made no effort at all

7. Did you make an effort to incorporate feedback received from the teacher into your next presentation?
Made great effort 5 4 3 2 1 Made no effort at all

8. Did giving other students feedback give you ideas about how to improve your own presentation?
Gave many ideas 5 4 3 2 1 Gave no ideas at all

9. Has practicing giving presentations in English given you more confidence in your overall English language abilities?
Much confidence 5 4 3 2 1 No change at all

10. Irrespective of English, do you think your overall presentation skills have changed?
Changed very much 5 4 3 2 1 No change at all

Turn over

Comments :
