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Name: Donald Patterson

Corresponding Author:
patterson-d@kanda.kuis.ac.jp

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Donald Patterson

Kanda University of International Studies

ABSTRACT

How do students feel about evaluating their peers and being evaluated by them when giving presentations? What can an instructor do to ensure students receive adequate feedback in larger classes? This paper addresses these questions by describing a preliminary study examining the efficacy of peer feedback on affect in small-group presentations. The methods and results described herein were presented at the 9th CamTESOL Conference on English language teaching on February 23, 2013 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Presentations are a common feature of many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes at the university level as they provide students the opportunity to utilize a variety of skills including research, writing, and public speaking. In traditional classroom settings, students take turns standing at the front of the class to present their work with their peers as the audience and teacher as sole evaluator. While the traditional method does provide the students practice in the aforementioned skills, there are several notable drawbacks:

- Student-talking time in the class is limited to just the few minutes allotted for their presentations.

- There is little extrinsic incentive to listen and learn from peers.

- Students who have not yet presented, may be too concerned with their own presentations to concentrate on their peers'.

- As Kwok (2008, p. 84) notes, assessment of student work in the traditional classroom tends take a top-down summative approach with the point of giving grades rather than constructive criticism.

The author of the present study decided to address these points through the use of a more student-centred approach. At the suggestion of a colleague, a class format utilizing interactive presentations performed on a loop with peer feedback was adopted so as to increase student-talking time and to involve the students more in the assessment process. A similar approach is described in Brown and Diem (2009); and a preliminary study by Lynch and MacLean (2000) suggests linguistic benefits for learners performing a speaking task on a loop.

Topping (2009, p. 20) defines peer feedback as "an arrangement for learners to consider and specify the level, value, or quality of a product or performance of other equal-status learners". It is becoming more common in student-centred classes as it turns audience members from passive to active observers; helps develop critical thinking; and provides a greater volume of richer, individualized feedback for students.

Research has shown peer feedback to be associated with positive cognitive gains for both evaluatees and evaluators (Rollinson, 2004, p. 24; Topping, 2009, p. 22). While the results of the research on peer feedback have been encouraging, most of the attention has been focused on its effect on writing and little research has looked into how students feel about peer feedback on their spoken output.

One small-scale study that has examined students' perceptions of the value of peer evaluation with regards to an oral project was conducted by Kwok (2008) with 19 Cantonese-speaking first-year undergraduate students in Hong Kong. It found that students felt that peer evaluation was both fair

and helpful; however, they expressed a preference for teacher-based assessment. The present study builds upon Kwok's work by examining student attitudes towards peer feedback of small group presentations as a supplement to teacher feedback in the context of a Japanese university with a larger sample size.

2. METHOD

The following broad research questions guided the study:

1) How do students feel about their dual roles as evaluators and evaluatees in small group presentations?

2) How fair and useful do students feel feedback from their peers and teachers is?

2.1 *Participants / Setting*

The study was carried out with eighty-eight (N=88) students (female=70, male=18; juniors=65, seniors=23) in five classes of a 15-week elective content-based English language course at a small university with a focus on foreign languages, located in the Kanto region of Japan from Fall 2011-Fall 2012.

2.2 *Procedure*

Each student was responsible for two individual presentations of 12 minutes in length which were repeated three to four times on a loop with changing audiences of two to three people. The presentations comprised two parts: a formal presentation and a related topic discussion. Presenters received both quantitative and qualitative feedback on both parts from their peers in written form, which had a fifty-percent bearing on their score, with the other fifty percent coming from the teacher.

At the end of the course, both qualitative and quantitative data was collected by means of a questionnaire. The questionnaire utilized a 6-point Likert scale and open questions asking how students felt about their experience as both an evaluator and evaluatee. Student participation was voluntary and anonymous.

2.3 *Explanation of the Peer Feedback Form*

In order to provide peer feedback, students utilized a standard form provided by the teacher (Appendix A). The form requested that students provide constructive criticism and a score from 1 to 5 (with 1 indicating poor performance and 5 indicating excellence) to rate the presenter's proficiency in two areas: the presentation itself and the presenter-guided discussion that followed. Students were given time in class following each presentation to compose their feedback. The feedback forms were submitted at the end of the class and the teacher compiled the scores and written feedback for each student. Presenters received a feedback form the following week with a combined teacher and peer score; a number of typical peer feedback comments indicating the points they had done well and the points they needed to improve; and constructive criticism from the teacher.

All of the students in the course were juniors or seniors and had received training in previous courses on what constitutes a good presentation. Early in the course, criteria for good and bad presentations were briefly reviewed, but considering the students' experience, minimal training for their role as evaluator was provided beyond the explanation of how to complete the feedback form.

2.4 *Explanation of the Questionnaire*

The questionnaire (Appendix B) was given as a two-page paper form with three parts: Part 1, which focused on the students' role as presenter/evaluatee; Part 2, which considered their role as peer evaluator; and Part 3 which invited students to share any general comments they had about the

presentation classes. Part 1 comprised 13 statements, each employing a 6-point Likert scale to measure the degree to which students agreed or disagreed; space was provided for students to explain why they had or had not enjoyed their role as presenter. Part 2 comprised 8 statements, employing the same Likert scale as in Part 1; space was again provided for students to explain why they had or had not enjoyed their role as evaluator. Part 3 was open-ended and provided space for students' comments. The following section presents the quantitative data from the 10 questionnaire statements that were deemed the most salient to the research questions, as well as relevant qualitative responses.

3. RESULTS

Table 1. Student responses to selected questionnaire statements regarding oral presentation evaluation

(N=80)	Mode	Mean	SD	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
1. I **enjoyed** the classes as a presenter.	5	4.99	0.80	97.50	2.50
2. I **enjoyed** the classes as an evaluator.	5	4.84	1.02	87.50	10.00
3. I think the peer (student) written comments were **fair.**	5	5.20	0.93	93.75	6.25
4. I was a **fair** marker.	5	4.93	0.88	95.00	5.00
5. I think the teacher's written comments were **fair.**	6	5.64	0.88	96.25	3.75
6. I think that the peer (student) written comments were **useful.**	6	5.26	0.82	96.25	3.75
7. I think the teacher's written comments were **useful.**	6	5.79	0.50	100.00	0.00
8. Being an evaluator made it **easy to focus** on the presentation.	5	4.48	1.17	82.50	17.50
9. Being an evaluator made it **hard to focus** on the presentation.	3	3.18	1.14	38.80	60.00

(N.B.: Not all percentages total 100% as not all students elected to respond to every question.)

Table 1 presents the results for selected questions from Parts 1 and 2 of the questionnaire. As described in the methodology section, students responded to various statements regarding their roles as evaluators and evaluatees through the use of a Likert scale to gauge their level of agreement or disagreement. (The scale ranged from 1 through 6 with the following meanings assigned: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = quite disagree; 3 = slightly disagree; 4 = slightly agree; 5 = quite agree; 6 = strongly agree.)

Selected items from Parts 1 and 2 of the questionnaire have been grouped above for ease of comparison under the following categories: how **enjoyable** the presentations were; how **fair** the students felt the feedback was; how **useful** the students felt the feedback was; and how **easy or difficult** being an evaluator made it to focus on the presentations. Below is a report of the qualitative and quantitative data generated on these categories.

3.1 *How Enjoyable Were the Presentations?*

Nearly all of the students indicated that they enjoyed their role as presenter with 97.5% indicating agreement with Item 1 in Table 1. The number of students who enjoyed evaluating their peers (Item 2) was 10% lower at 87.5%, but still a strong majority.

In their written comments, several students indicated that they enjoyed evaluating their peers, as it was a good opportunity to learn from their peers' presentation styles and reflect on their own presentation skills. One student expressed the sentiment this way, "I enjoyed listening to my classmates' presentations thinking about the differences between mine and theirs."

On the other hand, several indicated they would have been more comfortable as evaluators with more explicit training, a more structured rating form (e.g. using a Likert scale), a more formal format for the presentation, or more time to consider their feedback.

3.2 *How Fair Was Peer and Teacher Feedback?*

A strong majority of students felt that evaluation from both their peers, at 93.75%, and the teacher, at 96.25%, (Items 3 and 5 respectively), was "fair", but with a difference of 2.5%, a slight preference for the teacher was indicated. The majority of students also felt that they were capable of fair evaluation with 95.0% expressing agreement with the statement "I was a fair marker" (Item 4). It is notable that Items 3 and 4 indicate that the percentages of students who felt that they were fairly evaluated by their peers and those who felt that they were capable of fairly evaluating their peers were similar at 93.75% and 95.0% respectively.

Several students expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to evaluate their peers fairly due to a lack of training and/or time. Representative comments include:

- "I'm not good at evaluation of other people. I want to teach me how to evaluate fairly."
- "[The time] was a little bit for small presentations. If it was more formal I could evaluate it more fairly (clearly)."
- "I could enjoy as an evaluator but I didn't have much time to evaluate in class. Therefore, sometimes my evaluate was not good."
- "Evaluator was a difficult job for me, it was hard to mark the score in each person. But I enjoyed classmates' presentations."

On the positive side, one student commented that he/she was happy to provide peer feedback: "It was a good opportunity to let presenters know what I thought about their presentations. I just hope my comments helped."

3.3 *How Useful Was Peer and Teacher Feedback?*

A strong majority of students also agreed that peer comments were "useful" at 96.25% and they were unanimous in their agreement that the teacher's comments were useful (Items 6 and 7

respectively). Some students felt that immediate oral feedback would have been more beneficial than the collected written feedback when the presentation was still fresh in their minds and so they could have applied it to subsequent performances in the loop.

3.4 *How Easy or Difficult Did Being an Evaluator Make Focusing on the Presentations?*

As audience members, students had two challenging tasks; they were asked to focus on content presented in a foreign language while simultaneously evaluating the presenter's performance. Items 8 and 9 from Table 1 probed students' attitudes toward how their role as evaluator affected their ability to concentrate on the content of the presentations. The two items explored students' attitudes from opposing directions (i.e. ease and difficulty). While the percentages of respondents who agreed with Item 8 and disagreed with Item 9 and vice versa do not correlate perfectly, it is clear that a majority of students felt that evaluating their peers' performances helped them to focus on the content. Perhaps a more useful measure of students' attitudes than the percentages of those who agreed or disagreed with the statements is the mean responses. With the Likert scale running from 1-6, there was no middle neutral option. Yet, with mean scores of 4.48 and 3.18 for Items 8 and 9 respectively, it is evident that a number of students had mixed feelings.
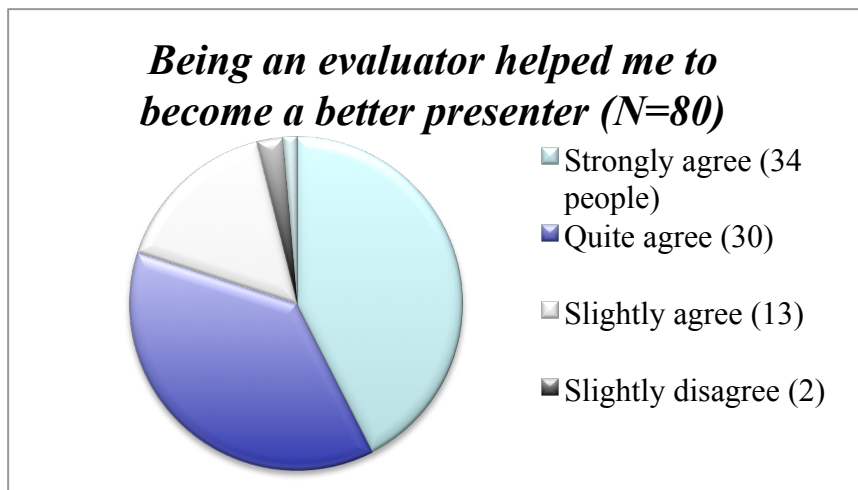

Being an evaluator helped me to become a better presenter (N=80)

- Strongly agree (34 people)
- Quite agree (30)
- Slightly agree (13)
- Slightly disagree (2)

Fig. 1. Student responses to the questionnaire statement: "Being an evaluator helped me become a better presenter."

Figure 1 shows students' responses to the statement "Being an evaluator helped me to become a better presenter" from Part 2 of the questionnaire. There was near unanimous agreement among students that being an evaluator had helped them to become a better presenter with 96.25% indicating some form of agreement and 42.5% expressing strong agreement.

A recurring written comment was that students felt that they were able to enhance their own presentation skills by critically observing a variety of their peers' presentations. The following comments typify this sentiment:

- "It was really interesting to see classmates' presentations. I learned from everyone's way to present. They were very nice."
- "To see many classmate's presentation, I can learn a lot of things. It can connect to improve my presentation."
- "During the presentations, I thought about their good points and bad points to write an evaluation sheet. I could find some good points that I want to take."
- "I could know about various topics and learn other students' good presentation skills."

4. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to shed light on student attitudes toward peer and teacher assessment of small-group oral presentations. Echoing Kwok's (2008) results, students expressed a preference for teacher evaluation over peer evaluation, but still expressed a high level of satisfaction with the feedback from their classmates. They indicated that they considered peer feedback to be both fair and useful, and that the process of evaluating their peers was beneficial to their own development as presenters.

Interestingly, student feedback was often of a different nature than that provided by the teacher, likely owing to the different perspectives and expectations. Students frequently commented on: the interest level of the topic; the amount of preparation and enthusiasm; ease of explanation; legibility of PowerPoint slides; and the quality of voice, particularly speed and volume. On the other hand, the teacher drew more attention to: grammar and spelling; posture and gestures; pronunciation and intonation; time management; and the citation of sources.

This division was not intentional on the teacher's part initially. However, once it had been noticed, the teacher realized how different his perspective of the presentations was by not being an audience member or peer. The teacher also recognized that more comprehensive feedback was provided by the combination of teacher and peers as they were commenting on different, but still important aspects of the same presentations.

While the study focused on affect, it was interesting to note that there was a moderate correlation between the grades given by the teacher and by the students at 0.5330151. Surprisingly, there was no correlation between the grades students gave and those they received at 0.010521509. While student marks tended to group around the median, they were able discriminate between performances. This ability to discriminate between stronger and weaker performances supports the assumption that students had received sufficient training through their previous courses to be competent peer evaluators of presentations. Nonetheless, it is clear from their comments that some would have felt more confident as evaluators had they received more formal evaluation training and/or more specific grading criteria. As Otoshi and Heffernen (2008, p. 66) suggest, one way the teacher may address this is through the co-creation of an evaluation rubric with the students.

Students appeared to take their roles as evaluators seriously. They were generous and thoughtful with their comments, and very few simply gave all the same scores indiscriminately. The seriousness with which students approached their roles as evaluators enabled the teacher to provide a

greater volume of feedback than would be possible on his own. That said, it should be noted that the use of student assessment did not result in any time savings as much time was needed to tabulate student scores and compile student comments. This, however, is something that could likely be improved upon by replacing paper-based feedback with online tools such as Google Drive's forms (for surveys) and spreadsheets.

5. CONCLUSION

While there are limitations to the applicability of this research due to the particular composition of the sample (e.g. approximately 80% female) and the reliability of student responses about their own feelings, the results are encouraging. They suggest that peer assessment is a positive, welcome supplement to teacher-based assessment, particularly in terms of constructive criticism. Students indicated that they appreciated the wealth of feedback provided. Reassuringly, most indicated that they did indeed read the comments and reflected on them before their next presentation. Going forward, the study begs two questions: 1) What effect does peer feedback have on students' language production in subsequent performances; and 2) How do students react to peer assessment in the absence of teacher-based assessment? Further research on these topics is required.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Appendix A

Presentation Feedback

Name: _____

*As your classmates are presenting, you should watch and listen carefully. When they are finished, I will give you some time to write down some comments and give a mark out **10 points** – 5 points for the presentation and 5 points for the discussion activity. Your comments will be shared with the presenters anonymously, so please try to answer honestly. Try to give constructive criticism in order to help your peers improve.*

Presenter's name: _____

Topic: _____

Write your comments for the **PRESENTATION** here. Think about how well the presenters <u>speak</u> and their <u>preparation</u>.
/ 5

Write your comments for the **DISCUSSION ACTIVITY**. Think about how <u>interesting</u> and how <u>enjoyable</u> it was.
/ 5

Appendix B

Questionnaire: Presentation Classes

This questionnaire is about your experience in this course's presentation and discussion classes. There are questions about your experience as both a presenter and as an evaluator (judge).

The information will only be used for research purposes. Your individual responses are anonymous and confidential, so please answer honestly. The questions use the following scale:

Strongly disagree	Quite disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Quite agree	Strongly agree
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**

Part 1: *Please think about your experience as a <u>presenter</u> for this part. Please circle your answer.*

1.   I enjoyed the classes as a presenter.   1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6

> Please explain why or why not:

2.   Presenting 3-4 times in one day helped me improve.   1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6

3.   I read the written comments about my presentations.   1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6

4.   I think the peer (student) written comments were fair.   1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6

5.   I think that the peer (student) written comments were useful.   1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6

6.   I think the teacher's written comments were fair.   1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6

7.   I think the teacher's written comments were useful.   1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6

8.   I thought about the written comments when I prepared my   1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6

     second presentation.

9.   I felt that my second presentation was better than my first.   1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6

10. I prefer my peers as the evaluator (judge) of my work.   1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6

11. I prefer the teacher as the evaluator (judge) of my work. 1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6

12. Written comments are more important to me than a score.   1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6

13. A score is more important to me than written comments.   1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6

Strongly disagree	Quite disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Quite agree	Strongly agree
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**

Part 2: *Please think about your experience as an <u>evaluator (judge)</u> for this part. Please circle your answer.*

1. I enjoyed the classes as an evaluator.   1------2------3------4------5------6

Please explain why or why not:

2. I was a lenient (easy) marker.   1------2------3------4------5------6

3. I was a fair marker.   1------2------3------4------5------6

4. I was a strict (hard) marker.   1------2------3------4------5------6

5. I became a better evaluator each time.   1------2------3------4------5------6

6. Being an evaluator made it easy to focus on the presentation.   1------2------3------4------5------6

7. Being an evaluator made it hard to focus on the presentation.   1------2------3------4------5------6

8. Being an evaluator helped me become a better presenter.   1------2------3------4------5------6

Part 3: *Do you have any <u>general comments</u> about the presentation and discussion classes?*

Please explain in detail:

Thank you for your help!

[Questionnaire adapted from Dörnyei (2008) and Kwok (2008)]