

EMPOWERING JAPANESE EFL LEARNERS WITH VIDEO RECORDINGS

Yasuko Okada¹, Takafumi Sawaumi², Takehiko Ito³

¹ *Seisen University (JAPAN)*

² *Kanagawa University (JAPAN)*

³ *Wako University (JAPAN)*

Abstract

It is becoming increasingly popular for individuals to record their behaviors or actions and upload them to a social network. In educational settings, students can also benefit from having their classroom performances video-recorded to improve their presentation skills and techniques. Specifically, it can be helpful for language learners to take advantage of opportunities to have their performances in the target language video-recorded for further improvement. Thus, this study examines the effect of using video recordings of student presentations in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. Six students who were enrolled in an English communication course were interviewed for this study. These students were asked about their experiences of having their own and their peers' presentations video-recorded, watching the videos, and using exceptional and average presentation videos as models for improvement. The students' interview data were analyzed using an empowerment evaluation approach, in which community members plan and implement a program and then evaluate its outcomes. The findings show that the students were able to develop strategies for how to deliver an oral presentation successfully and gain self-confidence in improving their English presentation skills in the classroom.

Keywords: empowerment evaluation, qualitative analysis, video recordings, English as a foreign language.

1 INTRODUCTION

On the basis of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Japanese people are growing increasingly interested in English language learning in educational contexts. Its purposes are to set student goals for English proficiency and clarify the fact that each student has obtained language proficiency steadily through elementary school, junior high school, and high school. It has recently become more common that Japanese universities are required to develop students' English abilities and educate them to be able to communicate in the target language. In such a social context, it is obvious that students will primarily be taught communication skills in English at the compulsory and higher education levels.

This paper therefore aims to explore ways of empowering students who are equipped with independent learning abilities by having them reflect on their skills and make progress accordingly, and thus empower themselves in their English language learning. In this study, we used video recordings of the students themselves, their peers, and non-native models as observational and reflective learning tools to develop university English as a foreign language (EFL) students' presentation skills. Through qualitative analysis of the students' interview data, the effect of the video recordings on students' English presentation skills will be discussed from the empowerment evaluation perspective.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What is Empowerment?

Empowerment is the process that provides power or position to a group or individuals in a certain condition. It is a value concept that socially disadvantaged people gain psychological and political power and then become free from such social conditions by empowering themselves. To realize this potential, empowerment requires a three-step approach: planning, implementation, and evaluation. [1] The term empowerment often appears in the contexts of international organization, and more specifically, in development assistance. [2][3] Sato identifies two directions of empowerment

evaluation: the deductive approach and the inductive approach [4]. In the former approach, development aid projects were conducted to empower members in the community; however, in most cases, the expected effect was rarely observed. In the latter approach, empowerment was not the original goal of the development assistance projects, but as a result of retrospective outcome evaluation, it was found that the community members were empowered.

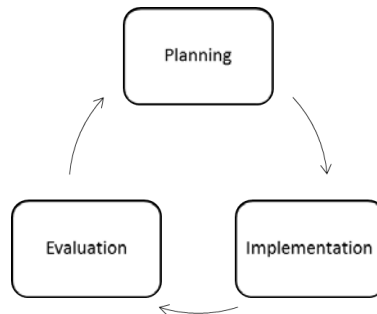


Fig. 1 Empowerment Evaluation

Empowerment evaluation is an evaluation approach that conceptualizes empowerment. [5] In empowerment evaluation, participants plan and conduct a project, and then evaluate the outcome. (See Fig. 1) This process provides an opportunity to improve the project, making it successful as a sustainable project thereafter. [5] This three-step cycle can be used to solve problems because human beings have a natural inclination to determine how they behave; hence, the program can be more effective in enabling people to identify their own problems, rather than having someone point them out for them, and thus improve the situation independently. [6]

2.2 Ten Principles of Empowerment Evaluation

In empowerment evaluation, ten principles have been proposed and discussed based on the key values of evaluation models. [7]

2.2.1 Improvement

Empowerment evaluators aim to positively affect community members who plan, act, and evaluate the program themselves. To do so, it is important to develop the stakeholders and improve the program.

2.2.2 Community Ownership

In empowerment evaluation, the community or program has the right to make decisions in the stages of planning, implementing, and evaluating the program. Therefore, the community members' responsibility is enhanced because they cannot shift their responsibility in the program to others.

2.2.3 Inclusion

Inclusion is a principle that is relevant to community ownership in empowerment evaluation. Direct participation in decision-making processes by the community members is considered valuable for the program.

2.2.4 Democratic Participation

Empowerment evaluation makes it possible for the program to fit the participants' needs and values by involving the stakeholders in the decision-making process, through which democratic participation is achieved.

2.2.5 Social Justice

Empowerment evaluators have to make the program successful in order to avoid inequities in society. This improves social conditions or communities where the participants are involved in the evaluation process. In empowerment evaluation, the participants are committed to making a difference in society.

2.2.6 *Community Knowledge*

In empowerment evaluation, community members who implement the program are considered to be experts on their community, and as they actually participate in the program, their knowledge is highly valuable. To enhance local thinking and practice by communities, empowerment evaluators use evidence-based strategies.

2.2.7 *Evidence-Based Strategies*

Empowerment evaluation puts an emphasis on scientific methods or evidence-based strategies. As seen in most examples, such methods or strategies can be effective in a community after adapting them to the community's knowledge.

2.2.8 *Capacity Building*

Empowerment evaluation makes it possible to build two capacities. One is evaluation capacity, which is used to evaluate the stakeholders; another is the program's capacity to plan, implement, and improve. Empowerment evaluation is designed to increase these two capacities simultaneously.

2.2.9 *Organizational Learning*

As explained in the first principle, empowerment evaluation requires program improvement. Such improvement can be considerable when organizational learning (the process to encourage learning) and learning organization (organizational structure that encourages learning) occur. Organizational learning is realized through data-based decision-making by the program participants and the development of a self-reflective and forward-thinking culture. [8] These characteristics can clarify the existence of a learning organization and therefore enhance the sustainability of empowerment evaluation.

2.2.10 *Accountability*

In empowerment evaluation, the stakeholder collects data to evaluate the program process, and he or she is responsible for staff activities and planning. This leads to a positive evaluation outcome.

The ten principles of empowerment evaluation have been mentioned above. This approach is an objective evaluation, in which participants in the program plan, implement, and improve the project. Participatory evaluation cannot only enhance the quality of the participants' actions but also the program itself.

2.3 **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine how the ten principles of empowerment evaluation can be applied to the process of teaching English presentation skills. [5] More specifically, we focused on students' perspectives of language learning and the effects of observational and reflective learning using video recordings.

3 **METHODOLOGY**

3.1 **Oral Presentation Teaching Procedure**

The students were enrolled in an English communication course in Spring 2016 at a university in urban Tokyo. Nineteen freshmen majoring in economics took this course as a requirement over a semester of 14 weeks. Each lesson lasted 90 minutes and the students met twice a week. The first author of the study taught the skills and techniques that were required in their oral presentations.

During the semester, students were instructed to deliver three oral presentations in English. The topics were "My favorite food", "My memories of high school club activities,"¹ and "My ideal trip." The students wrote a three-paragraph draft of 180-200 words, consisting of an introduction, body, and conclusion. Prior to each presentation, the students' drafts were turned in to the instructor at least once to receive content and language feedback.

¹ Regarding the second topic, some students asked the instructor to change the topic because they were not involved with club activities in high school. They were therefore allowed to write about family memories.

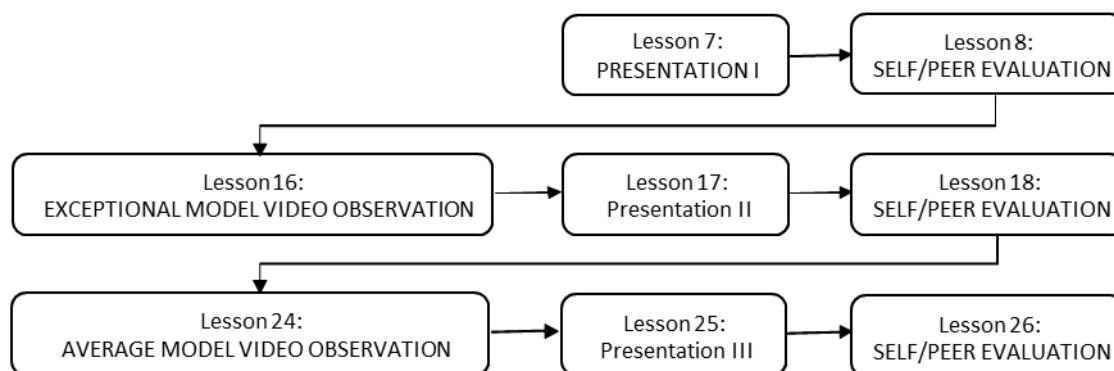


Fig. 2 Overview of the Teaching Procedure

Fig.2 shows the overview of the teaching procedure over the semester. First of all, as part of observational learning, students were shown two types of video-recorded performances by Japanese speakers (Lessons 16 and 24). Next, students delivered oral presentations that were video-recorded, and the audience was focusing on listening (Lessons 7, 17, and 25). Immediately after the presentation, students were asked about the effects of observing model presentations on their own performances (Lessons 17 and 25). Finally, students filled in self- and peer-evaluation forms while watching the recorded performances. In the evaluation form, a total of 11 questions were rated on a 4-point Likert scale with an additional comments column (Lessons 8, 18, and 26). Additionally, students were instructed to write about how their presentations had changed by watching model videos (Lesson 26).

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Participants

In Spring 2016, of the 19 students who had enrolled in the English communication course, six students (three males and three females) volunteered for the interview. They received remuneration for their interview participation. The average score of the TOEIC Bridge test for this class was 96.²

3.2.2 Interview Procedure

As interviews with the students were conducted after the project was completed, it was not easy to schedule enough students and interview slots for the interview survey. Hence, a semi-structured interview was conducted using several interview questions prepared in advance. The following are the five interview questions created by the authors: (a) Did you feel reluctant to study English? If so, why? (b) Did you think the instructions, such as using pronunciation symbols and word stressing, were helpful in delivering presentations? Can you explain why? (c) Were you confident in delivering presentations? How was each presentation? (d) Did you enjoy watching the three kinds of video recordings (model presentations, their peers, and their own presentations)? How were they helpful? (e) Was the model video sequence (exceptional video first and average video next) appropriate? How did each type of video recording motivate you to deliver your presentation?

While the students did most of the talking in the interview, it was a dialogue between the student and the instructor in Japanese. Each interview took approximately 15 minutes and was conducted during the lunch break. The interviews were recorded with an IC recorder, as well as video-recorded. The total amount of recording time was approximately 100 minutes for six students.

4 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In this section, we will show the results of the qualitative analysis of the interviews and discuss the students' comments from the perspective of empowerment evaluation. The focus of the discussion will

² Because one of the students had missed the test, the average score was taken from 18 students.

be placed on how the oral presentation instruction empowered the students and which learning strategies they used when preparing their oral presentations outside the class.³

4.1 Improvement

One of the purposes of conducting empowerment evaluation was to make an improvement in the students' presentation skills. As the students took the one-semester course to learn English presentation skills, it was difficult to demonstrate that this evaluation approach supported the improvement of the courses' instructional design. However, it was found during the interview that a student made a habit of practicing his presentations outside of the class to be successful. For instance, student M1 reported:

I made use of my spare time to memorize my speech. For example, I practiced while I was on the train or when I was in the bathroom. I even tried to memorize the speech before going to bed. I practiced, took a break, and practiced again, which was quite effective. (M1)

Student M1's comment shows that he found his own learning strategies to memorize his speech, even though he may not have had a profound impact on the curriculum design.

4.2 Community Ownership

Teaching English presentation skills was part of the lesson, and we also needed to consider the social context of Japan. While the curriculum design and classroom management were in the instructor's hands, the students' purpose of taking the course was primarily to earn credits for graduation, as well as to improve their English communication skills. Therefore, it was essential for the students to learn autonomously outside of the class, even though the instructor supported them as much as she could. In order for student F3 to achieve her purposes of taking the course, she practiced hard while creating her own strategies of memorizing her speech. She said the following during an interview:

I edited the draft. I always wrote it while reading aloud. I wrote it without paying attention to how bad my handwriting looked. I read it aloud and wrote it again. Then, I memorized each line and then each paragraph. (F3)

Community ownership requires members of the community to be responsible for the whole process. In this study, the students' responsibility was to deliver presentations; therefore, it was likely that they were able to achieve community ownership by preparing for their presentations.

4.3 Inclusion

Considering the principle of community ownership at the practical level, an instructor was involved in all aspects of the oral presentation instruction. More specifically, she made decisions about it from the teaching content to its methodology, which may have been totally natural in foreign language teaching. However, as the oral presentation instruction went on, students began to feel that they wanted to achieve good results in their subsequent presentations after independently practicing outside of the class. For example, student F3 commented:

From the feedback I received on my first and second presentations, I found out that I could have stood up straighter. So I was confident that I had all my weaknesses, such as my posture, fixed for the third presentation. (F3)

As demonstrated in the above example where the student was motivated for direct participation in delivering presentations, we believe that inclusion was achieved in this study.

4.4 Democratic Participation

In the oral presentation instruction, there was no specific comment to the instructor. During the interviews, when students were asked for feedback about the instruction, some students responded that more group work should have been incorporated because they felt that they had often worked in pairs. Generally, there can be a large gap in knowledge and experience regarding oral presentation techniques in English. Therefore, as the students could not catch up with building capacities, the principle of democratic participation was not achieved. Nevertheless, the teacher was able to raise her awareness of how she could improve her class in the future.

³ The students' responses were translated into English for this study.

4.5 Social Justice

The primary purpose of this oral presentation instruction was for the students to develop both skills so that they could succeed in the class, and by extension, society. However, it was unlikely that the students were able to see the long-term benefits of learning English presentation skills, and rather, they focused more on the short-term goal of doing well in the course.

4.6 Community Knowledge

In empowerment evaluation, the principle of community knowledge is based on the fact that members of the society understand the program well. In the oral presentation instruction, students became aware of the amount of time they needed for their speech by practicing it outside the class. Student F2 found that she succeeded in preparing for the third presentation more effectively:

I was able to memorize the speech better for the third presentation than the first one, but I feel that I practiced for this presentation as much as I had for the first one. (F2)

Delivering multiple presentations enabled the students to make use of what they had learned from the previous presentation. Thus, it can be said that the oral presentation instruction achieved the principle of community knowledge.

4.7 Evidence-Based Strategies

Previous studies [9] [10] show that observational or reflective learning using students' video-recorded performances is effective in developing presentation skills. Therefore, we used three different types of videos for the study. During the interview, students M1 and M2 commented on how these videos enhanced their awareness of the subtler aspects of the speakers' performances:

I noticed that my classmates and I were not good at making eye contact. After watching the videos, I thought that I would focus on improving this. (M1)

When watching exceptional model videos, I realized how poor my presentation was objectively, and that these model speakers were able to deliver presentations with confidence. Then, I planned to focus on improving what I had not done well in my next presentation. (M2)

4.8 Capacity Building

Capacity building is a principle that was achieved well in the oral presentation instruction. Students were able to increase the capacities that were necessary to evaluate presentations by watching model video presentations. Student M1 made the following comment:

When watching the model videos, I noticed the weaknesses of the speakers, but I also knew that I was delivering my presentation in the same manner. To me, the model performances served as a baseline of comparison for my own presentation and for evaluating others' presentations. (M1)

It was suggested that the students' empowerment was attained through building capacities, more specifically, evaluation capacity in this study.

4.9 Organizational Learning

As mentioned earlier, the oral presentation instruction was conducted over the course of one semester, and therefore it was not possible to show to what extent the principle of organizational learning was accomplished through it. However, the students watched their video-recorded performances after each presentation, and conducted self- and peer evaluations. For example, regarding English class in junior high school and high school, student M1 responded that, "I was not good at speaking, reading, and writing English. Because of this, I did not think that I would like it." After delivering presentations, student M1 commented, "I definitely feel a sense of achievement. At the beginning of the course, I had thought that three presentations were too much. But later, I thought there was only one left. When the third presentation was finished, I felt it was all over." He added, "I regret that I will not be able to have another opportunity to deliver a presentation. If there was another presentation, I would feel satisfied with it. At the end of the course I felt that I wanted to practice more." Even though the student participated in the course as a requirement, it was likely that he was able to improve by reflecting on his learning.

4.10 Accountability

In this study, the effects of oral presentation instruction were evaluated from the empowerment evaluation perspective. For this purpose, the instructor collected data from the students and conducted post-instruction interviews to evaluate the teaching contents, through which accountability was accomplished by the instructor, not the students. The following are some student comments regarding their experiences in the course:

I did not stress words nor use intonation in my first presentation. But after I practiced these skills in the lessons between presentations, I think that they were improved. (M3)

In junior high school and high school, I did not learn pronunciation symbols, so I never thought about them. Hence, it was very helpful for me to use the textbook for pronunciation and practice them in class. (F1)

5 CONCLUSIONS

Among the ten principles of empowerment evaluation proposed by Fetterman and Wandersman [5], six principles were relevant to the oral presentation instruction, which resulted in successful outcomes from the empowerment evaluation perspective. The four principles that were not possible to realize were improvement, democratic participation, social justice, and organizational learning. Although not all of the principles were achieved in this study, where empowerment evaluation was examined inductively, the oral presentation instruction using video recordings succeeded in empowering students in the EFL classroom. Thus, it would be reasonable to conclude that empowerment evaluation-based learning is effective for Japanese EFL students.

Despite the fact that English education in Japan has recently started emphasizing English communication skills, EFL has long been considered an important, compulsory subject that is required for students to pass entry examinations for university or college. To take these exams, most Japanese students spend many years studying grammar rules and vocabulary, and solving reading comprehension problems; as a result, many students develop a dislike of English prior to entering university. However, this study revealed that watching recordings of their peers' and their own presentations, as well as recordings of non-native model presentations, is effective for students to improve their English presentation skills and build confidence. In the future, implementing empowerment evaluation in an EFL context will make it possible to increase the number of students who are motivated to learn English and are able to make use of the language, not only in the classroom but also in society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the JSPS Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C) 15K02730 and Research Institute for Language Education at Seisen University, Japan.

REFERENCES

- [1] T. Ito, "Chapter 9 - empowerment evaluation," in *Empowerment no kaunseringu: kyooseiteki shakai shiten no kiso*. (T. Inoue, ed.), pp. 245 – 262, Tokyo: Kawashima Shoten, 2007.
- [2] Y. Fujikake, "Qualitative Evaluation: Evaluating people's empowerment," *Japanese Journal of Evaluation Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 25 – 37, 2008. Retrieved from http://evaluationjp.org/files/Vol08_No2.pdf
- [3] Y. Fujikake, "BOP business and empowerment of rural women: Case study of the 'Project to improve the living standard of rural women in Bangladesh through skincare products,'" *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 19, pp. 119– 136, 2016. Retrieved from <http://www2.igs.ocha.ac.jp/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/19.pdf>
- [4] H. Sato, "Enjo ni okeru empawaamento gainen no gan-i," in *Enjo to Empawaamento: Nooryoku kaihatu to shakai kankyo henka no kumiawase*. (H. Sato, ed.), pp. 3 – 24, Tokyo: Asia Keizai Kenkyujo, 2005. Retrieved from http://d-arch.ide.go.jp/idedp/KKC/KKC020700_003.pdf
- [5] D. M. Fetterman and A. Wandersman, *Empowerment Evaluation Principles in Practice*. New York: Guilford Press, 2005.

- [6] M. Ikeda, "*Enpawaamento hyooka moderu ni motodoku kyoin no baan-auto yoboo puroguramu no jissen*," Unpublished manuscript.
- [7] A. Wandersman, J. Snell-John, B. E. Lentz, D. M. Fetterman, D. C. Keener, M. Livet, et al. "Chapter 2 – the principles of empowerment evaluation," in *Empowerment Evaluation Principles in Practice* (D. Fetterman and A. Wandersman, eds.), pp. 27 – 41, New York: Guilford Press, 2005.
- [8] H. Preskill, "Evaluation's role in facilitating organizational learning: A model for practice," *Evaluation and Program Planning*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 291 – 298, 1994.
- [9] Y. Okada, T. Sawaumi, and T. Ito, "Different effects of sample performance observation between high and low level English learners," in *The 6th Centre for Language Studies International Conference Proceedings*, pp. 394 – 413, 2014. Retrieved from http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/cls/CLaSIC/clasic2014/Proceedings/okada_yasuko.pdf
- [10] Y. Okada, and T. Sawaumi, "Factors affecting student evaluation of video-recorded performance," *Nihon University College of Economics Research Bulletin: Liberal Arts*, vol. 77, pp. 267 – 280, 2015.