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Using PowerPoint for English Instruction of Economics Majors

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This research is being done to find out how effectively technology works to enhance students' motivation in a language classroom for economics majors. This study replicates a study done in 2002. This is an ongoing study; the author describes what was going on in the classrooms and how the students assessed presentation activities with PowerPoint. Dewey's "learning by doing" concept was used for the conceptual framework of the classroom activities. From the students' comments, results indicate that the students, both

presenters and audience, were learning through making presentations with PowerPoint. The students also seemed more active and focused when their classmates were giving a presentation than when just listening to a teacher talk.

本論は、経済学専攻学生のクラスで、英語学習意欲を高める方法として、授業内活動にコンピューター使用、特に、「パワーポイントを使用しての発表」を取り入れた経過、および、その結果を、学生からの声を基にして報告することを目的としている。この研究は、2002年度に筆者が行った研究の成果を踏まえたものであるが、まだ、研究途上にあるので経過報告となっている。この授業内活動は、「なすことによって学ぶ」というジョン・デューイ教育思想を実現すべく取り入れられたものである。学生の「声」によれば、発表者および聴取者というそれぞれの立場から、実際に発表をする、聞く、という経験を通して、より積極的に学んでいるようである。

Introduction

This research is being done in classes at Midori University (pseudonym), where I teach outside Tokyo, to find out how effectively technology works to enhance students' motivation in a language classroom for economics majors. This study replicates the study that I did at Keyaki University (pseudonym) in 2002 (Okayama, 2003a, 2003b). Based on the research results at Keyaki University, I have changed some of the activities implemented in classrooms at Midori University. This is an ongoing study, and I would like to report what is going on in my classrooms and how the students are assessing the activities.

Purposes

Purpose of the study:

To find out how effectively technology works to enhance students' motivation in a language classroom for economics majors

The purpose of the study is the same as that of the 2002 study. However, the environment of the classrooms is completely different. Gardner (1985, cited in McGroarty, 1996) writes “*motivation* refers to the combination of desire and efforts made to achieve a goal; it links the individual’s rationale for any activity such as language learning with the range of behaviors and degree of effort employed in achieving goals” (McGroarty, 1996, p. 5).

Judging from the pros and cons from the results of the 2002 Keyaki University study, the advantages were greater than the disadvantages in integrating technology into a language classroom for economics major students (Okayama, 2003a). In the new study, I tried to avoid the cons identified by the students at Keyaki University. For example, I avoided the requirement of looking at the Web site for my course, as many students told me that they could not afford access to the Internet. If the students had easier access to the Internet, I could provide a Web page for the course.

The classrooms where we are studying are not equipped with personal computers for students. There is not even a computer for the instructor’s use. Even though these classrooms are audio-visual classrooms, the only computer equipment available is lines that are waiting to be connected.

Purpose of the course at Midori University:

To improve “language competence” to understand each other better (Bachman, 1990, p.84).

The name of the course was “Global Communication I.” This was a one-semester course with one 90-minute class per week for 14 weeks.

The number of students is 25, and I decided to integrate technology with the class. According to the results of the questionnaire and responses in interviews with the students at Keyaki University, the PowerPoint presentations that we had done as a group activity had worked very well to motivate the students (Okayama, 2003a). I decided to introduce this course activity at Midori University, too. This was done not only to enhance students’ motivation but also to let them experience how to communicate with other people in a group/class through group activities and giving a presentation to their classmates.

Problems

However, there were some problems before I could ask the students to give presentations with PowerPoint in this class at Midori University. The following are two of the problems:

1. Students at Midori University are 1st year students, and most of them are not used to PowerPoint presentations at all.

Before we started the classroom activity, I did a questionnaire to determine the participants’ familiarity with technology at Midori University.

According to the results of a questionnaire given to all Midori University economics majors that I teach, 62% of the students ($N = 76$) say that they had never heard of PowerPoint. 29% of them had heard of the name but had never used it before. Therefore, 92% of the students had never used PowerPoint before. I was teaching 76 students for 4 courses then at Midori University, but I could only introduce the PowerPoint activities to one of the four courses as it was physically difficult to introduce PowerPoint activities in other three courses. As for economics majors in this study ($N = 23$), 66% of the students had never heard of the name, and 17% of the students had heard of the name but never used it before. Therefore 83% of the participants had not used PowerPoint before.

At Keyaki University, I had almost no problem when I told the students to give presentations with PowerPoint. As some students were not confident in using it, I taught them the basics during lunchtime. At Keyaki University, economics majors were provided with laptop computers when they entered the university so that they could become accustomed to computer use at home. PowerPoint was installed on the laptops (from my field notes).

2. The classroom at Midori University does not have any computer at all, although there are screens and lines for computer use on the teacher's desk in front of the classroom.

At Keyaki University, personal computers were provided for each student in the classroom. There was also a Panasonic auto-recording system that could record a PowerPoint presentation digitally. Students and teachers can see their own presentations later. If necessary, the digitally recorded file can be uploaded to the class's Web site. When I was working on the classes, I

did not put the recorded files on our site as the copyright issues were not clear yet (from my field notes).

However, at Midori University, it seemed difficult for the students to start working on their project by themselves without any experience with PowerPoint. Therefore, I arranged one class meeting for them to learn how to use PowerPoint. We gathered in the computer room at the University. There, I taught them basic skills for using PowerPoint. I thought it might be a little difficult for the students to use PowerPoint with only one lesson, but I told them it would be a good chance for them to practice using it. It was “learning by doing” (Hibi, 1998, p.46).

For presentations by the students, I brought my own laptop computer for the students to use for every class meeting.

Conceptual framework

Following my previous studies at Keyaki University, this study tries to show how the skills of economics majors are enhanced for reading, writing, speaking, and listening to English through presentation activities with PowerPoint.

In this study for the conceptual framework of the classroom activities, I used Dewey's “learning by doing” concept.

Dewey writes “[a] piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory” and “[s]uch an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. That is *an* experience” (Dewey, 1939, cited in McDermott, 1981, p. 555). Hibi states that in 1964 Mrs. Dewey answered “learning by doing” when asked during a trip to Japan what the core thought of Dewey's educational philosophy was (Hibi, 1998, p. 46).

When I had a chance to observe a private elementary school in San Francisco in March 2002, I was very impressed with the students there. They seemed to enjoy being at school. They were very relaxed even in the classroom. They had a small farm at the school. When they had a gathering, both teachers and students made a circle outside, singing a song along with a guitar played by one of the teachers. It was quite different from a gathering at a Japanese elementary school.

I interviewed the principal of the school, and she told me that the curriculum of their school was based on the philosophy of John Dewey. They called it “Project-Based Learning.” One day, a first-grade student was doing an assignment with her parents. She was trying to make 100 by adding the things at their house. They made formulas such as “3 cats + 5 people + 5 chairs + 50 plates + 37 books = 100.” They were actually counting the things. The student was actually doing counting and experiencing counting numbers. She seemed to be enjoying doing so. The parents had to work together, and the school requires the parents’ cooperation (from my field notes).

At a university in Georgia in March 2003, I again encountered Project-Based Learning. The undergraduates were working with graduate students in a team to solve a real problem. Problems to solve in a group were provided by a professor, and each student decided which team she/he would join. I heard from one of the professors that the students had been really motivated in participating in this project as they were trying to solve a real problem (from my field notes).

Looking at what these schools were doing, I have been wondering if I could introduce *Learning by Doing* into my classroom. Learning English by using technology

may demonstrate Dewey’s concept. The project, giving a presentation with PowerPoint, is the real purpose for the students, as they have to give a presentation in a classroom in front of a real audience. This activity can become “an experience,” as stated above.

Methodology of the study

This study is trying to find out how activities are enhancing students’ motivation through the description of the participants in the classroom activities with technology. As this study is qualitative, the students’ comments with the results from the questionnaire are used as data.

The participants in the studies at both Keyaki and Midori universities are all economics majors. Methods such as observation, interviewing students who have done presentations, and open-ended questions have been used to understand what participants are thinking along with activities.

Activities in the classroom

In a classroom, I was required to use a textbook, “Global Concerns” by Paul McLean (1999). Besides reading this textbook I introduced some activities for the students to communicate with each other in English. I asked the students to give less-than-one-minute talks on various topics such as “introducing my friends,” and “my best/worst memories.” Then, I introduced PowerPoint presentations.

The purposes of the presentation with PowerPoint:

1. To have the students get accustomed to giving a presentation with PowerPoint
2. To have the students get accustomed to reading English articles on the Internet
3. To have the students experience the project in a group

As the results of the previous study showed, the students can easily manage giving a presentation, and the students enjoyed doing it (Okayama, 2003a, 2003b).

Students were required to give a presentation with PowerPoint in a group on any topic they liked. They needed to collect articles through the Internet, using mostly English articles as data for the presentation.

For the course at Midori University, learning computer skills is not required for the course as it was in the previous study at Keyaki University, but I wanted the students to get accustomed to reading and using English articles as data for their presentations. Students usually read English articles to understand their content, as understanding the content was the purpose of the course and was to be tested at the end of the semester. As they are economics majors, they do need to read both English and Japanese newspaper articles to understand and use them as data sources in their future courses. To prepare them for the future, I wanted them to get accustomed to finding the articles written in English through the Internet.

The PowerPoint activities

Group presentation

1. Six groups of four to five students
The students were divided into groups of four to five students.

I wrote a schedule of group presentations with six groups, and those who wanted to give their presentation on a certain day filled out the lists. As we also had to study the content of the textbook, we had only one group presentation in one class meeting of 90 minutes.

2. What to talk about?

Anything the group members wanted to talk about was fine. For example, the first group talked about Chelsea FC of England. The second group talked about Osama bin Laden's life story. As this was the first presentation, it would be easier for both presenters and listeners to choose topics which students were more interested in.

3. Each person/presenter had five minutes to talk.

If there are 5 members in a group, the presentation time is 25 minutes. They could use their time as they wanted, but each student had to talk in English for at least 2 minutes. When one of the group members was talking, other members were working on the computer to change PowerPoint scenes. Other than that, members were just listening to a peer's presentation. Students were quite nervous standing in front of classroom, they told me later. The classroom was dark enough to see the screen so that other students besides the presenter could do nothing but watch and listen to the presentation.

4. PowerPoint use was obligatory.

5. The language used was English.

Audience

They wrote comments about each presentation in Japanese.

In the comments of the listeners, many students said the topic was interesting and that they could understand the presentation well.

Presenters

They were asked by the teacher simple questions regarding the process of making the PowerPoint presentation, and they wrote comments on their own work. These questions were made during the presentation time if there is time left or, if not, during the intermission after the class.

Individual presentation

At the end of the semester, the students are required to give an individual speech for two minutes. If they want to, they can use PowerPoint. As for individual presentations, PowerPoint was not made obligatory as I thought that some students might still have a hard time preparing a presentation with PowerPoint owing to the lack of availability of a computer with PowerPoint. As an individual presentation will be the second presentation for the students, they will be asked to select economic/political/social controversies as their topics. At the point of writing this paper, it is still in the middle of the semester and I do not know how well students will give individual presentations.

Comments from the students

Here are some comments from the students translated from Japanese.

Comments from presenters

The presentation of the first group

1. As no one in this group knew how to use PowerPoint, we really didn't know what to do. Then we found a friend of someone who could teach us how to use it. We worked for about 3 hours yesterday and even today. It was fun.

2. I wish we had used more pictures and colors, and more sentences. Next time, I'm sure I will do a better presentation.

3. It was quite difficult to make a presentation with PowerPoint and give a presentation for the first time in this class. The shorter sentences are better understood by the audience.

The presentation of the second group

1. The letter size (font) was too small. We should have used the larger ones. We should have spoken in louder voices. I really enjoyed working with my friends. It was fun.

2. It was difficult to decide the structure of the presentation. PowerPoint itself was not difficult at all. Next time, I am sure that I will be able to give a much better presentation.

3. The most difficult part was to decide the topic. Then, we had to look the articles up on Internet sites. As these articles contained many difficult words, I had to spend much time reading them.

4. I found that our voices do not project well in the classroom. We thought our product was perfect, but the actual pictures were not. The letters were too small for the audience to read and we just used the same methods. They must have had a hard time to understand us. I am sorry that I could not read well as I did not practice enough.

Comments from the audience

The presentation of the first group

1. It was good that they spoke slowly. The topic was interesting. However, there were only long sentences in the PowerPoint; they should have made them shorter.
2. It was easy to understand, as I know about the topic very well.
3. I thought it was great. I wish they had spoken more clearly. I am impressed with their presentation as it looked like a “presentation” with the PowerPoint. I am glad to know that we could do it.

The presentation of the second group

1. It was quite easy to understand, but if they had used more pictures it would have been much easier to understand.
2. If they did some kind of analysis of Bin Laden’s acts, the presentation would have been much deeper.

For future study

From these comments, I could see that the students, both presenters and audience, were learning through making presentations with PowerPoint. I do believe, from my

observation, that the students seemed more active and focused when their classmates were giving a presentation than just listening to a teacher talk.

As one presenter said, they searched the Internet to find the right news articles for their presentation. Without realizing it, they were reading more articles than they thought. This should be a good practice to improve their reading ability.

However, as I learned from the questionnaire done at Midori University, not all the students have access to the Internet at home. Approximately one-third of the students who participated in the study at Midori University had not used the Internet with a computer. All of them have cellular phones, which have e-mail systems that are used by most of the students very often. If some kind of system could utilize the e-mail system of cellular phones, then it might be easier for our students to use than computer e-mail systems. As 84 percent of the students that I teach at Midori University think that using a computer is enjoyable, we should not ignore this system as a learning tool for the students. They can experience and learn at the same time with computer use.

This study is not complete yet and there are many points to be studied more in the future. As the classroom activities are ongoing at the time of writing, I would like to make a report again after I have finished this course. Especially after individual presentations, I am very much interested in how students felt about differences between group and individual presentations. Comments from interviews with the students will be included in the next report. Then I may be able to understand the students in more depth to obtain the goals of the course and the study.

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