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Effects of Presentation Classes in English Language Curriculum: Focusing on Phonetics/Phonology and Syntax

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Abstract

The qualitative effect of class is influenced by the instructor's class design and operation method, but it comes from motivating students to actively participate in class and utilizing potential qualities that lead to student-centered learning. Students' activities and the quality development of class participation can be utilized in presentation-based classes. This could be confirmed through the presentation classes in English language curriculum applied to English major students in Korea. In other words, with presentations conducted in language-theoretic classes such as phonetics/phonology, and syntax, it turned out that immersion in learning, concentration on class, and motivation for learning can be improved, developing systematic self-directed learning ability and cooperative mutual communication ability. Instructors need to lead the direction and design of the classes, but the actual educational effect depends on how students accept the academic tasks, how well they understand the learning contents, and how well they can systematically transmit them to others. In this respect, this study aims to investigate that learner-centered presentation classes contribute to making learners develop their competencies in class design, data utilization, imparting knowledge, and communication, which would bring about the improvement of learning quality and educational effects.

Keywords: *Presentation-based Class, Class Design Competence, Communication Competence, Self-directed Learning Ability, English Language Curriculum, Educational Effect*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the emphasis on learner-centered instruction in today's university education, there is a growing need for educational methods that can meet learners' needs and educational effectiveness. In particular, the educational focus is on the extent to which learners achieve learning concentration, learning interest, and efficient learning effects from the perspective of the learner rather than the instructor [1]. Such learner-centered classes are referred to as good classes [2-4], and among them, presentation classes can be said to be learner-centered classes. A clue to support this viewpoint is that when the English language curriculum such as phonetics, phonology, or syntax is operated as a presentation-centered class, we can find that students are more engaged in the class and improve their comprehension of the learning content, indicating that presentation class is one way to enhance the effectiveness of student-centered class. Studying and organizing pre-assigned materials individually or in group work and sharing the acquired knowledge with other learners could trigger an enhancement of learning ability in the preparation processes and the communicative performance. These

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processes are highly likely to establish a springboard for developing self-directed learning skills. Students also face an opportunity to develop affective and cognitive developmental skills through persuasion, cooperation with others and compromise by performing interactive communications such as question and answers or discussions after the presentation.

Therefore, this study emphasizes that presentations are a necessary teaching method to improve the quality of academic education and utilize learner-centered classes effectively. To prove it this study attempts to find out the learning effects aroused in classes when English class involving phonetics/phonology, and syntax are implemented as presentation-based classes to students in department of English education at a university located in a local region in Korea.

2. PRELIMINARIES ON LEARNER-CENTERED CLASS

From the educational perspective, good lessons are defined as cognitive, collaborative, social, reflective, learner-centered, developmental, and experimental learning, when the contents of the lesson are clearly understood, communicated, and developed by the learners with feedback from the instructor [5]. This results in the level of learning which is appropriate for the learners to construct through practice and experience. This includes active interactions between the instructor and the learners, in which the learners come to reach the objectives of the lesson where the given materials are appropriate to their abilities. In the interactive student-driven classes, students would be more likely to be intellectually and emotionally satisfied [6].

The purpose of teaching is to impart knowledge and enhance the learning competence of the learner through instruction. However, teaching competence is not only limited to the conveyance of knowledge or the behavior of the instructor but is linked to various aspects such as the learners' participation, the learning processes, the learning contents, and the learning outcomes [7]. These conditions for teaching competence may be the competence to lead effective classes with learners. Developing effective teaching skills is first and foremost connected with improving the effectiveness of teaching methodology and maximizing the students' learning effects [8]. In addition, to achieve the effective learner-centered instruction, cognitive efforts of learners are required to plan their own learning to reach the learning objectives, which is accompanied by an interest and enthusiasm for learning [9-11].

Therefore, it is believed that student-centered teaching can be a practical teaching method that can maximize the educational effectiveness in a classroom [12], resulting from inducing students to be engaged in learning as well as requiring the teaching skills of the instructor. Presentation-based class is a teaching method that stands at the center of this student-centered class. Accordingly, this study analyzes the effectiveness of student-centered classes based on the cases of presentation-centered classes.

3. METHODS AND CASES OF PRESENTATION CLASSES

This section treats the cases of students' presentations performed in the spring and fall semester in 2022. The ratio of instructor's lecture to student presentation time was approximately 40:60, and the presentation time per student was about 10-15 minutes. Presentations were made in groups or individually, and most presenters used a power point program as a tool. They succinctly summarized their shared work and tried to have the listeners understand the contents; when some of them needed specific academic background knowledge or some related examples, they asked for assistance during the presentation, and I provided the required clarification.

In phonetics/phonology, and syntax classes, the second- or third-year students who wanted to give a presentation voluntarily were given the opportunity to do so, and about 70-80% of the students performed their presentations. In the phonetics/phonology class, students in a group were asked to create mock test questions based on what they had learnt, and so they created and presented the questions as shown in (1). As the presenters gave the answers the questions related with the phonetic features of English vowels, fellow students were able to clarify the distinction between the pronunciation of [ɔ] and [o] and recognize exactly which words these vowels are phonetically realized in. A presenter used Table 1 to distinguish the words with [ɔ] and [o] and show the subtle pronunciation differences between British English (BE) and American English (AE).

(1) Presentation Case 1: Phonetics (Mock Test Questions)

1-1 Select all the words with [ɔ] and [o] in the three sentences below.

1-2 Write the phonetic symbols for the words you picked in 1-1 including [ɔ] and [o].

- (1) You told me that they were holding a chalk.
- (2) The dog was gnawing the ball hoping the trainer to throw it.
- (3) Her daughter caught a cold.

[Answers]

1-1: told, holding, chalk, gnawing, ball, hoping, throw, daughter, caught, cold

1-2: Table 1

Table 1. Words with [ɔ] and [o]

Words with [ɔ]		Words with [o]	
<i>chalk, ball, gnaw, daughter, caught</i>		<i>told, hold, hope, throw, cold</i>	
BE: [ɔ:]	AE: [ɔ]	BE: [əʊ]	AE: [oʊ]

The case (2) is about minimal pairs in a phonology textbook. The presenter explained the definition and examples of minimal pairs on a tablet, highlighting the related examples as in Figure 1. Besides, he/she provided other minimal pairs that a single different phoneme causes the contrast between the two words as in [b]ite-[l]ight, [b]owl-[s]oul, deb[t]-dea[d], etc. and non-minimal pairs like [b]ite-[br]ight, This shows that presentations influence on activate the presenter's learning ability and supplemental exploration for learning.

(2) Presentation Case 2: Phonology (Minimal Pairs): *jail-Yale, budge-buzz, witch-wish*

The pairs of words used above to show the overlapping environments and contrasts are known as **minimal pairs**. Simply defined, **minimal pairs are pairs of words that have exactly the same sounds in the same order except for a single difference in sounds, and have different meanings**. These are well exemplified in the pairs (a)–(c) above. Notice that **the only way we can create a minimal pair with reference to the two sounds involved is to put them in exactly the same environment in terms of word position and the surrounding context**. To clarify further, the pair: **jail**–**Yale** shows the contrast between /dʒ/ and /j/ in initial position, **budge**–**buzz** focuses on the contrast between /dʒ/ and /z/ in final position, while **witch**–**wish** contrasts /tʃ/ and /ʃ/ in final position. It should be noted that minimal pairs include forms that have different spellings, as evidenced in

Figure 1. Minimal pairs in phonology

The case (3) is a part of a presentation on the subadjacency condition (SC) in a syntax class. The presenter explained the ungrammaticality of the sentence by pointing out the structural problem through a tree diagram as shown in Figure 2. When PP [of his latest book] moves to the position after the subordinate verb *appeared*, SC is satisfied since one bounding node NP in the subordinate clause is crossed. However, when the PP moves to the position after the main verb *worrying*, SC is violated since three bounding nodes are crossed: NP and S in the subordinate clause, NP in the main clause. The presenter provided that the surface ungrammatical sentence (c), violating SC, should be ruled out. This presentation verifies considerable achievement by learner's advanced learning.

(3) Presentation Case 3: Syntax (SC)

SC: No constituent can be moved out of more than one containing NP or S node.

- (a) The fact that a critical review [of his latest book] has just appeared is very worrying.
- (b) The fact that a critical review has just appeared [of his latest book] is very worrying.
- (c) *The fact that a critical review has just appeared is very worrying [of his latest book].

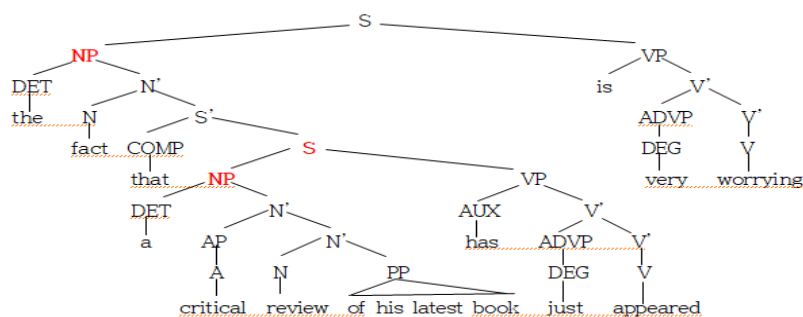


Figure 2. A tree diagram for SC

Such presentation classes represent a meaningful learning process that encourages interaction and cooperation among students as they learn various linguistic knowledges and rules together, enhancing learning interest, concentration in class, self-directed learning, and academic performance.

4. PROCEDURE AND ACHIEVEMENT

4.1 An Opinion Survey on Presentation-based Classes

A total of 58 students (36 in phonology and 22 in syntax) who took presentation classes in spring semester (syntax) and fall semester (phonology) of 2022 were asked to write anonymously about the advantages and disadvantages of presentation-based classes. I collected duplicative or similar opinions from students' answers, including cases where one student wrote more than one advantage or disadvantage, and organized them into 10 advantages and 6 disadvantages as shown in Table 2, and marked the number and percentage of students who answered each question.

Table 2. A survey on the advantages and disadvantages of presentation-based classes

advantages	No.	Rate
1. I can understand the content that I have presented.	43	74.1
2. As preparing for presentation, I have an opportunity to study other supplemental materials.	35	60.3
3. Listening to my peers' presentations makes learning less boring and more engaging.	31	53.4
4. When I'm satisfied with my presentation, I'm more motivated to study harder.	38	65.5
5. Lessons or contents in which I get it wrong or make a mistake are remembered longer.	29	50.0
6. I can gain the experience to speak confidently in front of others.	45	77.6
7. I come to study more intensely the parts I'm engaged in presenting.	53	91.4
8. I'm able to better summarize main points as preparing for my presentation.	46	79.3
9. It is good to share what I've learned individually for a presentation.	33	56.9
10. By checking my knowledge as I prepare for a presentation, I can fill in my academic deficiency and solidify what I know.	31	53.4
disadvantages	No.	Rate
1.The quality of a class can be low as the presenter is not well prepared.	16	27.6
2. Sometimes the contents that a presenter explains are not as clear as they'd be.	9	15.5
3. I'm apt to concentrate on the only parts I present.	12	20.7

4. It takes a long time to prepare for a presentation.	31	53.4
5. It's hard to work with colleagues who are unprepared or uncooperative when preparing for a presentation in group.	8	13.8
6. Class progress is delayed as a presenter doesn't properly present.	19	32.8

The results of the survey show that a relatively high proportion of students agreed that the advantages are learning more intensively, increasing their willingness to learn, and gaining the experience of speaking in front of others with confidence. On the other hand, the disadvantages are that the quality of the class decreases or the class is delayed when the presentation is not good enough, and the time burden of preparing for the presentation is burdensome. However, the commonality of all opinions, including students who did or did not present themselves, is that the presentation class contributes to improving learning concentration in class.

4.2 Results

Table 3 shows the academic performance of presentation-oriented classes, phonology and syntax, in 2022; the academic evaluation scores of presenters and non-presenters are limited to the latest 2022 records. Phonology was taken by 36 students and Syntax by 22 students, of which 28 and 15 presented respectively. When comparing only midterm and final exam scores (graded on a 100-point scale), excluding assignments, presentations, and attendance, the average academic performance of presenters was significantly higher than that of non-presenters. These results are also shown in the t-test, as shown in Table 4. The t-test of the two groups, presenters and non-presenters, shows that the mean is significantly higher in the presenter group as the t-value is 7.761, $p=.000$.

In Table 3, we can see that the average score of syntax presenters is higher than that of phonology presenters, but the average score of non-presenters is lower than phonology. To find out why the number of non-presenters in the syntax class was higher than expected and the average score was lower, individual interviews were conducted after the grade evaluation. The non-presenters said that they generally acknowledged the positive effects of the presentation-based classes, but they found the tests and learning contents difficult. This represents that the non-presenters need structured guidance to help them understand what they are learning and to keep them emotionally motivated.

Table 3. Average academic performance scores of presenters and non-presenters

subjects	attendee	presenters	average score	SD	non-presenters	average score	SD
phonology	36	28	69.05	8.3063	8	47.30	5.9506
syntax	22	15	74.88	6.9945	7	32.38	7.1380

Table 4. T-test results of presenters and non-presenters

	participants	M	SD	t	p
presenters	43	42.6	7.9	7.761	.000*
non-presenters	15	24.2	7.8		

* $p<.05$

5. CONCLUSION

In this study, we found that presentations could be a great way to improve learners' participation and communication skills, as well as to help them organize their presentations logically and identify key points. For an effective presentation class, it may be worthwhile to focus less on how the presentation itself is

performed and more on how well the content is organized or explained by the presenter and how well it is understood by fellow students.

A survey of students' opinions on presentation-based classes showed that the presentation class actively encourages students' participation in the class, maximizes students' learning capabilities as a student-centered class, and improves students' ability to develop various teaching and learning methods such as lesson design capabilities, material utilization capabilities, content instruction strategies, and communication capabilities. Presentation classes allow students to take the initiative to improve the quality of the class, to think and act creatively, and to engage in active interaction. It can be said that presentation-based classes eventually contribute to the development of students' creativity and learning ability, inducing self-directed learning and communication, so it is expected that it is worthwhile to utilize the presentation-based class in other curriculums. An additional consideration is that there should be a need to develop an adaptive strategies for non-presenters by providing academic assistance and affective encouragement.

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