

Developing Students' Autonomy in Oral Presentations through *Pecha Kucha*

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study conducted at Sanata Dharma University, promoting students' autonomy in oral presentations by using *Pecha Kucha*. In recent years, English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' oral presentation skill has become a major challenge. Although students may spend 6 up to 12 years in learning English, it is a fact that most students are not able to deliver effective oral presentations, even though they may have done thorough preparations. Even though these students undergo courses that are designed to develop the strategies and skills which are considered necessary for effective oral presentations, many of them are still not able to deliver effective presentations. To encourage the students towards independent learning and improve their presentation skills, *Pecha Kucha* has been introduced in the beginning of the semester. The study was conducted in one semester, in the year 2015. There are 40 subjects who participated in this study, and they are students of the English Department, Faculty of Letters, Sanata Dharma University. Recorded presentations were collected at regular intervals and semi-structured interviews were conducted to demonstrate the essential findings of the analysis. The most significant findings are that in the process of *Pecha Kucha*, students become more autonomous in arranging ideas and that most of the students become more independent and active in English language learning and eventually enjoy the process.

Keywords: *Pecha Kucha*, students' autonomy, oral presentation

1. Introduction

It is known that oral presentations have become essential in most courses offered in universities. The importance of oral presentation has been acknowledged widely, and many undergraduate programs require students to make oral presentations as part of their coursework. Developing oral presentation skills is considered very important. Good oral presentation skills will allow students to communicate ideas and information easily in a way that would be understood by the audience.

In English Department, Faculty of Letters, Sanata Dharma University, the English language courses designed for undergraduate students emphasize on developing their oral presentation skills. Students find such courses a challenging task, especially when it comes to speaking in class and assessed by the lecturer. The performance of many students tend to be on the average, with very few of them are slightly above average grades. One of the English language courses that students of English Letters Department need to enroll is Speaking

IV. This is a compulsory course for all students and they have to obtain at least C grade. This course is aimed at developing the strategies and skills necessary for effective oral presentations.

Unfortunately, from the observation in Speaking IV classes, the students seem to have boredom and lack of motivation and participation during the course. Students may be influenced by lack confidence in participating in class presentations because students' classroom discussion consists primarily of recent issues and in-depth analysis. Lengthy and elaborate presentations are avoided due to poor vocabulary and fear of making mistakes. *Pecha Kucha* presentation format is introduced to help student to improve their presentations skills and build their autonomy in developing their oral presentation skills. At the core of this project was also the creation of a motivating learning environment that would allow students to develop both their speaking and organizational skills and encourage autonomous learning, thus enabling the transition from a teacher-centered

environment to a learning environment that focuses on the learner.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Learner autonomy

Learner autonomy in language learning has been a topic of interest in recent years. Learner autonomy can be understood as a capacity for active, independent learning. Little (1991), for example, sees autonomy as a “capacity—for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action” (p. 4).

Furthermore, Arikan & Bakla (2011) also discussed learner autonomy in blogs with 17 Turkish students. The result of the project showed that students were very interested and they were able to choose various reading texts from the internet. However, the students were at beginner level students who encountered the difficulty with new vocabularies the various texts provided. The project has shown that the students were able to apply various strategies that fostered learner autonomy.

Thus, learner autonomy can be seen as an attitude on the part of the learner towards taking control of the language learning process and assuming responsibility for the process. The ability to practice autonomy requires the learner to have an understanding of the nature of language learning and of their role in that process. The understanding of learner autonomy as a capacity is important since we want to be able to conceive of learners maintaining learning autonomy in a teacher-centered classroom teaching as well as in settings such as self-directed learning.

Autonomy then is something which is essential to the learner and not necessarily connected to particular learning situations.

2.2. Oral Presentation

Oral presentation skills are the integration of all major receptive and productive skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. McDonough & Shaw state:

Preparing learners to give short oral presentation in class to the rest of the group is useful way of achieving skills integration in the classroom. It is possible to devise a fairly rudimentary evaluation sheet where small groups of students are asked to answer questions which might cover: what they thought of the presentation; was it well organized and were they able to follow the main points; could they summarize the talk for someone who was

not present; did the speaker make effective use of visual support material; what advice would they give to the speaker for future presentation. This activity can thus interrelate the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills in a motivating way (215).

Furthermore, besides enhancing academic skills, oral presentations also contribute to a positive classroom atmosphere. Meloni & Thompson (1980) stated that, “the oral report gives the adult student the opportunity to establish an identity as an individual with an interesting background and special knowledge. This leads to a more integrated and spirited class and markedly raises class interest” (p. 510)

From this perspective, oral presentation is a perfect example of the activity that can be practiced while teaching through communicative approach. Besides, during oral presentations, students are always encouraged to take an audience centered approach to communicate ideas to real people rather than merely stand up and go through the actions of delivering a speech. Nowadays the classrooms have become an ideal place where students can develop both confidence and experience by practicing these skills before the audience, who are friendly and helpful and made up of students who will have to go through more or less the same experience.

Oral presentation has been identified as one of the most effective classroom activities by both EFL and ESL teachers to promote communicative competence of the learners who are competing into today’s global village. The acquisition and learning of oral presentation skills not only enhance learners’ critical thinking and analyzing abilities but also foster learners’ autonomy through their growth in collaborative and interpersonal skills.

2.3. Pecha Kucha

Pecha Kucha is a simple presentation format where 20 images are shown, each for 20 seconds. The images advance automatically and the presenter will talk along to the images. The presentation format was created by Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham of Klein Dytham architecture in Tokyo Japan, in February 2003. It was first designed as an event for young designers to meet, network, and display their work in public (*Pecha Kucha*, 2013). The presentation format is very concise and effective. It was designed so that it can easily gather the audiences’ attention.

Presentations are limited to 20 slides, each shown for only 20 seconds (set up to automatically advance), for a total time of 6 minutes and 40 seconds. The presentation format requires the presenters to use less words and more relevant pictures and graphics appropriate to the topic (Artyushina, et al., 2011).

Pecha Kucha is the Japanese word for “chit chat”. It is pronounced as pe-chuk-cha, but more commonly heard as pe-cha-ku-cha. This worked well as an alternative conference paper presentation to tighten 20 minutes of presentation time to 15 minutes reducing the possibility of presenters going over time, and ensuring 5 minutes for questions. Presentations are expected to have structure, including an introduction and conclusion and an internal structure (clear main points, transitions, etc) that will guide the audience through the slide show.

Pecha Kucha is acknowledged to be an effective and efficient way oral presentations. In *Pecha Kucha*, audiences are likely to be more engaged. Consequently, speakers need experience presenting their ideas in a short period of time and in a more creative, engaging way. The short presentation time results in the audience having plenty of time to ask questions and make comments about the presentation. *Pecha Kucha* presentations as used in the classroom are also a form of creative revision where each student helps other class members by giving a personal perspective, with researched data, on a selected topic.

3. Implementation

The project took place in the beginning until the end of the semester. By using *Pecha Kucha*, the timing that the students have for each presentation was as follows: 6 minutes and 40 seconds for the presentation itself, followed by a question and answer session discussing several issues raised by the speaker (which lasted roughly five minutes). Given this timing, 10 presentations were allocated to each lesson; the project was thus completed in 4 lessons, or slightly around four weeks. The presentation was assessed according to the marking grid used in university levels to evaluate oral exams. The speakers were also required to hand in written reports of their preparation and presentations to allow a fair assessment of the amount of effort they had put into this project.

4. Preparation and Presentation

In Speaking IV class, the opportunity to make an oral presentations in front of the classroom made a number of students feel uneasy and insecure since they have to present a particular topic or recent issue. At the same time, they had already given talks in other topics, most notably language and literature topics. Thus, in preparing their *Pecha Kucha*, no detailed instructions were given; instead, the students were encouraged to build on their experience and to treat presentations like any other presentation they had done before. While preparing their *Pecha Kucha*, the students were then presented with a list of topics as potential presentation. Since the topics mentioned on that list are fairly general, they tend to repeat very frequently across the different language subjects, and this repetition affects the learners’ motivation in a negative way. On the other hand, some students, mostly those whose writing or listening skills were more developed than their speaking skills, found these topics encouraging, as the familiarity with the topic allowed them to focus on form rather than content during the preparation of their *Pecha Kucha* presentation. Others, however, were intense on choosing their own topic for their *Pecha Kucha*, an option which had been proposed as well, under the condition that they get the teacher’s approval first; this option resulted in a number of highly unusual and innovative presentation topics, such as “The Sexual Abuse Among Youth in University in Indonesia” or “Sanata Dharma Mengajar: Students Teaching Students”.

From the observation and recorded presentation, the students seem to have clear pronunciation and fluency so that the audiences get the idea of the topic presented by each presenter. The delivery of the content itself is effective and efficient. On the other hand, from the interview with the students, the information about their preparation is obtained. The student set the time up of each part in their presentation independently. They also make their own criteria to select information for their *Pecha Kucha* topic. Interestingly, they also develop their own way or style to present their topic in *Pecha Kucha*. In addition, they also develop a good attitude towards question and answer session, especially when they have to deal with audience’s feedback.

In this project, teacher is no longer a source of knowledge. Instead, teacher will function

more as an organizer, a consultant, and a supporter. As an organizer, teacher will give guideline on how to make *Pecha Kucha*, provide the possible and potential topics for the students. As a consultant, teacher will give students feedback and comment during their preparation on Pecha Kucha, both the PPT file or even the presentation itself.

The absence of a formal briefing in the students' preparation, of a discussion of the structure of *Pecha Kucha* Presentation, is at the same time the strength and weakness of this stage of the project. One might argue that the fact that the students were given free restraint concerning the topic of their presentation as well as its structure is a first step towards the concept which Little and Dam refer to as "learner empowerment": the learner is made responsible for his or her process of learning, is allowed to modify the presentation to suit his or her needs and abilities and should therefore experience an increase in motivation, all of which should place the foundation for a successful learning-centered learning environment. As such, instructing the students to depend on a structure, the assimilation of which the teacher cannot be entirely sure of, seems inadequate and also inefficient in the process of reaching the established learning goals. Thus, the teacher cannot be entirely sure whether the students have actually combined the structures they have been taught, which makes the process inadequate and inefficient as far as reaching established learning goals is concerned.

5. Results and Conclusion

The benefits of using *Pecha Kucha* presentation format as a means of developing students' presentations skills and encouragement of learner autonomy are therefore clear: the learner is required, even forced to act autonomously. The students need to develop a series of skills and eventually assume the role of a teacher, trying to present new information to his or her classmates. This role setback creates an opportunity for the learner to demonstrate his or her motivation and requires him or her to use language in a very precise, almost technical fashion, which in turn favors the acquisition of a particular skill through the very use of that language, as what *Pecha Kucha* requires the students to have in their presentations.

Little states that responsibility needs to be developed and practiced, and that mistakes are natural to happen during that practice; moreover, he adds that the participants' sense of self-fulfillment is likely to increase if this responsibility is practiced on a regular basis (Little, p.15). What is true of this *Pecha Kucha* project on a micro-scale level is, for example, the presentations themselves, remains true on a macro-scale level, which concerns the organization and realization of the project: even though a number of errors appear throughout the project, the benefits are essential and encourage the repetition of this type of activity in the future.

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