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Digital Speech Classes: A Pathway into Future

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ABSTRACT

Designing an effective interface for English Speaking classes to monitor output, notice weaknesses, and provide feedback has always been a challenge for English teachers. The ephemeral nature of speech hinders assessment, peer review, and self-reflection of L2 spoken output for both students and instructors. This study investigated the use of video recording for speech classes. Video recording of speeches has proven to be a great tool that offers direct benefits to learners including: providing a tangible record of what was said, being a great opportunity for peers to watch the video again for detailed online feedback, and allowing students to reflect on how their oral skills for improvement. Data was collected for the duration of one academic semester (16 weeks) from undergraduate students at two universities; 48 South Korean university students and 37 Pakistani university students. A mixed method approach was used to analyze data that was collected in form of participants' speech recordings, feedback comments to their peers, self-reflection, and interviews responses. A detailed comparison is also provided between Korean and Pakistani university students' attitudes and performance in speech classes using video recording as a tool for assessment, peer-feedback, and self-reflection. A comprehensive description is provided that reveals students' perceptions towards recording as a tool to enhance speech skills, the effects of video-recorded in-class speeches, reflection tasks, and online peer feedback. The findings suggested that the video-recorded speeches helped learners enhance their speaking skills. This also supports the existing research supporting the effectiveness and wide applicability of video-recorded speeches in content-based instruction. More importantly, the study offers some practical tools and strategies for setting up a video-recording infrastructure for speech classes. The goal of this study is to engage practitioners about collaborative learning, so they can subsequently implement this information in their own respective classrooms.

Keywords: Video recorded speeches, online feedback, peer assessment, self-reflection.

Introduction

The increasing rate of accessibility to the internet around the world and digitalization of video recording tools have enormously improved the viability of integrating these tools in language instruction. Nowadays, digital technologies allow learners to video record their speeches and transmit video files for assessment, feedback, and further review. Video recordings of speeches have proven to be a great tool that offers direct benefits to learners including: providing a tangible record of what was said, being a great opportunity for peers to watch the video again for detailed peer-to-peer assessment and online feedback, and allowing students to reflect on how their skills are developing. This also supports the existing research suggesting the effectiveness and wide applicability of video-recorded speeches in content-based instruction (Gimeno-Sanz, 2015). In support of the existing studies, Brown (2012) conducted a recording based project that involved speaking and self-assessment. Post project

questionnaire results suggested that learners enhanced their intelligibility, attitudes, and perceptions of improvement through recording as a tool for speaking and self-assessment. Aoki (2014) insisted that learners showed high engagement in asynchronous speech recording exercises. This helps them to focus more on negotiation of meaning which in turn encourages their peers to take more risks. In terms of grammatical accuracy in oral output, learners generally performed better after self-reflection (Cooke, 2013).

The Problem

Oral presentation skills are considered an important component in the workplace (Omar et al., 2012) where workers are often asked to deliver progress-reports, present proposals, elucidate the output of projects, explain product descriptions to vendors, and conduct oral briefings (Indra Devi, Amir & Krish, 2014). Therefore, in order to maintain a sustainable business, employers have created an unprecedented demand for diligent graduates with sound academic backgrounds and exceptional oral communication and presentation skills in English (Indra Devi, Amir & Krish, 2014; Singh & Singh, 2008). At the university education level, oral presentations have become an important part of class throughout the world (Alwi & Sidhu, 2013; Campbell, Mothersbaugh, Brammer & Taylor, 2001). It is quite common in EFL classrooms for teachers to conduct live oral presentations in front of the whole class in order to help learners enhance their English public speaking skills (Hinkelman, Rian & McGarthy, 2011). Oral presentations enhance communicative competence, assist learners to observe, investigate, arrange, and build new knowledge as well as help them to gain autonomy in class (King, 2002).

However, in-class speeches are the least participated in activities in class because of the difficulty associated with them (King, 2002). Most EFL learners consider in-class speech activities to be the most feared and daunting tasks (Guo, 2013). In particular, many Asian students, who are shy and tend to stay quiet in class (Kim, 2006), perceive public speech activities as the most intimidating tasks in class (Tajizan et al., 2012). The main reasons for EFL learners' reluctance for in-class speeches include the fear of public speaking, conducting mistakes, being ridiculed by others, and their lack of confidence in making English speeches (Guo, 2013). Besides the many challenges for EFL learners associated to in-class speeches, assessment of oral presentations remains an issue for instructors (Yang & Scharff, 2013). The subjective judgment in the absence of any concrete evidence makes assessment a bigger challenge for instructors (Yamkate & Intratat, 2012). Not only do the instructors face troubles assessing EFL learners' in-class speeches, but the students also struggle to identify their own weaknesses and mistakes in their speeches (Guo, 2013).

In order to address above mentioned issues, it is important to develop more sustainable methods that offer a creative environment for EFL learners to improve on their in-class speeches, get reflection on their oral production, provide peers constructive feedback, and reduce the constraints faced by instructor to perform transparent assessment and to provide feedback to learners. Video recording of in-class speeches helps learners to get more constructive feedback, provide chances for self-reflection, give more accurate teachers' assessments, and generate feelings of improvement (Balakrishnan & Puteh, 2014).

Discussion Questions

1. Does video recording of EFL learners' speeches improve their oral skills?
2. What are the learners' perceptions towards in-class video recording of their speeches?

Methods

Data Collection

A mixed method approach was used for the data analysis that was collected through a 16-week academic semester. Data was collected from 48 Korean and 37 Pakistani university sophomore EFL learners registered for a presentation course. Learners ages ranged from 20 to 22 years. Their average English proficiency level was intermediate mid, according to the ACTFL guidelines (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages). All learners possessed a basic understanding of how to use computers and the internet. Quantitative data was collected in the form of learners' speech recordings and their feedback comments. Whereas, qualitative data was collected through self-reflection and interviews conducted with 10 randomly selected participants at each university. A quantitative research methodology was used to analyze learners' speech recording data by using a comparison approach. Their speech score was compared with their previous speeches and examined to see if there was any improvement. The feedback comments provided by their peers were also analyzed and determined if the speakers had addressed the feedback comments in their speeches. Self-reflection and interview responses were used to qualitatively analyze participants' feelings and attitude towards video-recording as a tool to enhance oral production.

Procedure

As mentioned above, the first part of this pilot study was designed to reveal students' attitudes and perceptions towards the video-recording of their speeches. It also examined the effects of in-class video-recorded speeches, usefulness of the reflection tasks, the practicality of peer assessment, and the effectiveness of online peer feedback. The effect of video recording as a tool for EFL learners' public speaking skills development was analyzed using seven variables including: speech length, fluency, confidence (eye-contact, gestures, and posture), pronunciation, preparedness, audience engagement, and responses to audience's questions (See Appendix-A). The findings were used to analyze if/how the video-recorded speeches helped learners enhance their speaking skills. The second part of this study outlined practical techniques and activities for setting up a video-recording infrastructure for speech classes. This approach further provided evidence that the above-mentioned strategies could likely be expanded to all conversation based classes in general English and content based learning programs from elementary schools to universities.

Setting

A four speech project was the main part of the credit course for a semester in addition to the regular class instruction for learners' speech skill development. For each speech, students were able to choose the topic following the guidelines and parameters for each speech provided by the teacher. The duration for each speech was from 4 to 6 minutes. Through a systematic approach, they prepared their speeches in class and outside of class. They were asked to bring their recording devices (e.g. smartphone) on the speech day and set their smartphone/tablet on the tripod provided by the instructor before their speech. Those students, who did not have a functional device or complained about low battery power, were asked to borrow their peer's smartphone for recording. After completing their speech, they had to upload their recorded speech to class website on the same day. Each student was required to provide 2 other students feedback within 2 days of the speech session. Therefore, they visited the class website and watched two videos to comment on them after the class. They were instructed to provide both complements and constructive feedback. Compliments helped speakers to see what amused or impressed the audience, whereas the constructive comments pointed out their weaknesses and guided them toward the future improvements. Each speaker filled out a

reflection form (see Appendix-B) after watching their speech video. Both the peer feedback and the self-reflection helped them to reflect upon their work. The instructor assessed the speech roughly in class while the speaker was presenting. However, the instructor also watched the speech video again for a comprehensive assessment of each speech. This helped instructor to be more accurate in evaluation. Besides the peer feedback that included complements and constructive feedback, learners were asked to complete an assessment form (See Appendix C) for the speakers they provided feedback to. This helped learners to examine the assessment criterion carefully, and to overcome their own weaknesses as well.

Literature Review

According to Bennett (2011), 98% of East Asian students at the university level have access to some sort of digital devices. Most of them own a smartphone or a computer, the rest of them have access to computers or other digital devices at their school library. With the surging popularity of online resources (e.g. Social Networking Sites, Chat apps, online discussion boards), the number of internet users is now in the billions (Smith, 2011). Among all of the various types of internet technologies; micro-blogging has most rapidly made its way into education (Bennett, 2011). Online discussion boards are increasingly present in language classrooms as well. Therefore, some studies (Junco et al., 2010) have examined the effect of online resources on language learning pedagogies in the classroom, especially on the learners' linguistic ability, attitude, or content acquisition in an EFL context.

With the revolution in internet technologies, electronic devices such as smartphones, tablet PCs, and laptop computers are becoming an important part of human lifestyles across the globe. Data from the *International Telecommunication Union (2014)* suggested that the rate of using mobile phones in South Korea in 2014 was 111%, which means there are more mobile phones than there are people. However, the penetration rate for smartphones among mobile-phone users in the whole country was 82.3% at the end of June 2015, while more than 97% Korean university students possessed smart phones (Choi & Kim, 2015). Similarly, in Pakistan, one of the fastest developing countries, the use of digital devices is on the rise. Javed (2012) reported that most Pakistani university students possess a digital device of some sort, the rest of the students access the internet at the school library. This shows that, in this big global cellular phone market, the smartphone is gaining momentum and becoming more and more of an essential part of human life, especially for college students.

Based on the data provided above regarding the emergence of digital devices in Korea and Pakistan, it seems as though bringing these digital devices into the EFL context by educating students about their potential usefulness is a realistic strategy as opposed to offering resistance towards the use of smartphones, considering them distractions to learning. Choi and Kim (2015) suggested that an average Korean university student spends 3~4 hours per day using a smartphone for different purposes like browsing the internet, reading news, or accessing social media. On the other hand, most Pakistani university students spend an average 90 minutes to 2 hours per day using digital devices (Javed, 2012). With this greater investment of time associated to smartphones, social scientists in the EFL field (e.g. Warschauer, 2013) are convinced that EFL learners need to be encouraged to utilize digital devices, considering their potential to enhance EFL learning. This study attempted to provide EFL learners a perspective, away from the traditional approach, in which they can use digital resources as a part of their EFL learning. This will not only facilitate EFL learners' oral skills enhancement, but also learners can integrate these digital resources into their overall learning.

Results

The findings suggest that most Korean and Pakistani participants showed a little bit of hesitation towards recording their own speeches in the beginning of the course. However, they changed their perception and showed positive attitudes towards video recording as a tool for their public speech skill improvement. In addition, the data revealed that learners enhanced their public speaking skills gradually based on peer assessment, peer feedback comments, self-reflection, and instructor's feedback. Digital video recording provided an opportunity for EFL learners to experience growth, both verbally and physically, when giving a speech or presentation. Oral feedback from the teacher, written comments from peers, and self-reflection on video recorded speeches helped learners to implement simple changes in their speeches for gradual improvement throughout one academic semester. Offering learners a chance to be an evaluator for others' speeches helped them to reflect on their own speech style, quality, language use, and preparedness. Having such an opportunity to evaluate and offer constructive feedback to their peers led students to express a sense of inclusiveness and fairness regarding the evaluation process. Peer evaluations were used as a major source of scaffolding and skill development throughout the course. Subsequently, students were open in evaluating their peer's speeches by justifying through their comments the reasons for their assessment scores within the categories and ranges for each rubric used. Through this process, students' evaluations of peer speeches became somewhat closer to those of the instructor's as the semester progressed, and yet they still were able to maintain their identity and uniqueness in their feedback comments.

Discussion

With the emergence of internet technologies around the world and the digitalization of video recording tools, EFL classroom instructions are going through a phase of transformation. The results of this study suggested that learners improved in-class speeches through a comparison approach using video recording as a tool for their public speaking improvement. The findings also revealed that both Korean and Pakistani EFL learners showed positive responses towards the use of video recording for in-class speeches. These findings correspond with the findings of Balakrishnan & Puteh (2014) that suggested video recordings helped learners to get more constructive feedback that helped them to plan for their future speeches more carefully and thoughtfully. The result of the second research question indicated that Korean and Pakistani EFL learners showed positive responses towards the use of video recording as a tool for the improvement of their speech skills. This supported Watkins (2012) who proposed that video recording for speech classes could offer EFL learners feelings of improvement. Following the benefits of video recording for in-class speeches that this study examined, learners realized the importance of constructive peer-feedback that they received after their speeches. Aoki (2014) claimed that EFL learners show high engagement in asynchronous speech recording that helped them watch recorded speeches of their peers carefully for constructive feedback. This helps them to focus more on negotiation of meaning which in turn encourages their peers to take more risks. The most important aspect that was discussed in this study was assessment. Instructors' feelings of satisfaction in terms of transparent assessment through the use of video recording was noted. This relates to the research of Watkins (2012) that claimed more accuracy in instructor's assessments resulted through watching learners' video-recorded speeches. The results also supported the idea that learners gained grammatical accuracy in oral output through self-reflection (Cooke, 2013).

Conclusion

Digital video recording of speech classes can be a mandatory part of the assessment of speech classes. This helped learners to be more precise and effective while providing peer feedback, and completing the self-reflection sheets. This tool would be valuable not only in speech classes, but it could also be included into daily classroom applications so that learners could experience immediate benefits. When coupled with peer feedback and self-reflection strategies, presentation techniques can be improved drastically through video recordings within a very short period of time. Peer-to-peer assessment and offering constructive feedback after watching recorded videos not only helped participants reflect upon their oral skills but also provide learners autonomy in class. Peer assessment provided them with a chance to closely look into the assessment criterion and plan their future speeches carefully based on the evaluation requirements. Video-recording proved to be a great tool not only to enhance learners' performance, but also it provided instructors a chance to watch the video again and evaluate students' speeches more accurately.

Recommendations

Based on the proposed benefits of this study, a few recommendations are outlined for the practitioners for their classes.

1. Video-recording should be a mandatory part of speech classes.
2. Self-reflection helps learners to perform self-analysis and therefore learners need to be encouraged to complete self-reflection sheets after watching their speech videos.
3. Video-recorded speeches give peers a chance to watch these speeches in the leisure time and provide the speaker with more effective feedback that points out not only the progress that the speaker made, but also the areas to improve on in future speeches.
4. Evaluating their peers' speeches makes learners feel proud of their work which in turn helps them to integrate more into the context. This also benefits them to feel more autonomous in class.
5. Video recording of speeches provides instructors an opportunity to bring more transparency into their evaluation practices. Therefore, the goal of non-biased assessment can be achieved more thoroughly through video recording of speeches.
6. Video-recorded speeches provide more a student-centered environment where the teacher plays a role as a facilitator.

Limitations

Besides the numerous benefits of video-recorded speech setting in class, there are a few limitations of this study and within the context.

1. Some students may not have the resources to afford a smartphone of adequate quality to record a full length speech.
2. Sometimes students forget to recharge the battery which prevents their smartphones from recording the speeches. In addition, sometimes their smartphones do not have enough memory space to record and save a video file.
3. Learners' hesitation to video record themselves could cause embarrassment for them when they watch their own recorded video.
4. Some students may favor their friends for assessment. This could interfere with the peer assessment.
5. A bigger data set could help to accurately define the results.

Further research will be needed to explore how to most effectively exploit digital video recording as a tool for enhancing EFL learners' oral communication skills.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Presentations. Final Speech Fall 2017, Date Dec14
 Name _____ Topic _____

No	Category	Performance Score					Comments
		2	4	6	8	10	
2	Hook	2	4	6	8	10	
3	Introduction of topic	1	2	3	4	5	
4	Audience engagement	1	2	3	4	5	
5	Summary of main points	1	2	3	4	5	
6	Transitions & Sequencer	1	2	3	4	5	
7	Body. 2 evidence + example	2	4	6	8	10	
8	Voice Inflection / Powerful voice Stretch/stress/pauses	1	2	3	4	5	
9	Eye Contact	1	2	3	4	5	
10	Preparedness & Reading	1	2	3	4	5	
11	Gestures & Posture	1	2	3	4	5	
12	Restatement of Thesis	1	2	3	4	5	
13	Length	2	4	6	8	10	
	Total Score	_____ /75			Grade Score/15%		
Compliments:					Need to be improved		

Appendix B

Presentations-1. Eye Contact & Visuals Speech-1 Fall 2017
Self-Reflection

Name: _____ St. ID _____

2. Name 3 COMPONENTS of your speech that you think were best.
1.
2.

3. What do you think you've learned about presenting during Speech-1?

4. I think I need to work more on ...
1
2

5. I am most concerned about
1.
2.

6. How do you think Bilal can help you enhance your presentations skills?

Appendix C

Presentations-1 Fall 2017 Speech 5
Peer Assessment and Editing Sheet Nov 30, 2017

Name						
Topic						
Transition	Preparedness	Voice Inflection	Length	Audience Engagement	Posture/Gesture + eye contact	Total
1-15	1-10	1-10	1-10	1-10	1-15	/70
Things that Impressed you.				What to be improved		
1				1		
2				2		
3				3		
Comments:						