

Action Research on the Effect of Formative Assessment on the Oral Presentation of Business English Majors

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Abstract: Formative assessment, as a developmental assessment, is widely used in teaching activities. Through four rounds of action research, the author conducts empirical research by means of questionnaires, interviews, scale, and other ways. Through the form of teacher intervention in the classroom, the author explores the impact of formative assessment on the oral presentation of core competence of Business English Majors (language expression, public speech, critical thinking, business knowledge, and information technology) by a variety of formative assessment methods such as self-assessment, peer-assessment, teacher assessment, and online learning growth portfolio to see whether the training can work, and which dimension has been improved the most. The author finds that the student's performance has significantly improved in all five dimensions.

Keywords: formative assessment; action research; oral presentation

Notes on the contributor: CHEN Qionglu holds a master's degree in English translation. She is a lecturer at Henan Institute of Technology with an academic interest in translation and interpretation assessment. Her email address is Chenchengodlen@163.com.

1. Introduction

Chinese National Education Reform and Development of Long-Term Planning Programs (2010–2020) propose to improve education and teaching assessment. A scientific and diversified assessment system should be established according to the training objectives. Teachers should keep a good record of students' growth and strive to cultivate high-quality talents with all-around development of morality, intelligence, physique, and beauty. Oral presentation in the classroom is based on Constructivism and Output Hypothesis theory, which is conducive to enriching students' humanistic knowledge, cultivating their capability to analyze and solve problems, and strengthening their awareness of autonomy (Yao 2014). However, in the actual teaching process, the author finds that the traditional teaching model of “teacher-centered class” is still in the mainstream in the



universities. Although the long-term existence has its rationality, it only transmits scattered dogmatic knowledge to students and is not conducive to the cultivation of creative talents (Liu 2009). The oral presentation is very important in students' career development. It is very pivotal for students to develop lifelong learning abilities, especially for higher education (Campbell 2001). Combined with the talent training program for Business English Majors in her university, the author divides the oral presentation ability into five dimensions: language expression (L), public speech (P), critical thinking (C), business knowledge (B), and information technology (I), and tries to explore various assessment methods to promote students' performance in an oral presentation.

2. Literature Review

The oral presentation is considered multi-modal communication: students often prepare a written report and convert it into visual effects (slides) including text, pictures, and sound. During the speech, students communicate in different ways, including verbal (sound, tone, rhythm) and nonverbal (eye contact, gesture, facial expression) communication. These different modes interact to form a coherent and communicative intention - information (Sundrarajun & Kiely 2010). Due to its multi-modal nature, most English oral reports frighten many students. The speaker must have a good command of English, be able to clearly organize his/her own language and master the relevant knowledge of the topic he/she is presenting (De Grez et al. 2009), link verbal output to visual effects (Magin & Helmore 2001). However, how to cultivate students' oral presentation skills, and whether teachers' participation can develop these skills, are becoming increasingly important. A useful method is to be evaluated by students, peers, and teachers through relevant classroom demonstration activities (Aryadoust 2015). Peer assessment and self-assessment in the oral presentation have two purposes: (1) provide detailed and personalized oral skill guidance to improve students' future performance; (2) reflect the real level of students in order to predict teachers' assessment of them (Campbell 2001). The potential benefits of self-assessment to learners include cultivating autonomous learning ability, increasing understanding of assessment procedures, and strengthening self-reflection. When the key factors affecting self-assessment can be determined, the different scores produced by self-assessment and teacher (or peer) assessment could promote students' insight into autonomy (Langan et al. 2008). Research shows that students' participation in self-assessment and peer assessment of oral presentation can enable them to understand the criteria of the presentation and find their weaknesses (Langan et al. 2005). However, to promote students' performance, students need to participate in the assessment process (Lee 2005). Self-assessment and peer-assessment are regarded as important formative assessment tools in language learning and higher education (Han 2018). The concept of formative assessment was first put forward in the curriculum research developed by M. Scriven, a philosopher at the University of Chicago in the 1960s (Kemmis, S. & Henrty, C. 1989). The so-called formative assessment refers to the assessment of "students' performance, achievements and the development of emotions, attitudes, and strategies reflected in their daily learning process." It is a developmental assessment based on the continuous observation, recording, and reflection of the whole process of students' learning. At present, scholars at home and abroad mostly focus on four fields. Firstly, scholars give attention to the relationship between formative assessment and autonomous learning; Secondly, scholars focus on the construction and development of formative assessment system; The third field pays attention to the application of formative assessment in English classes in junior high

schools, senior high schools, and universities, which are also divided into applied research in English writing, vocabulary learning, translation ability, medical English teaching, and portfolio assessment; The fourth area is mainly some relevant empirical research. However, the assessment of oral representation in Business English courses has received little attention (De Grez et al. 2012). The purpose of this study is to examine whether the oral presentation performance could be affected through conducting several formative assessment activities (teacher assessment, peer assessment, and self-assessment).

3. Research Methodology

This study mainly adopts action research. Action research is a self-reflection survey conducted by practical workers to improve the rationality and correctness of their practical work. The result is to improve the performance of students and give a clearer explanation and justification to educational principles.

3.1 Study subjects

The subjects of this study are 60 students from a class of 2020 majoring in Business English in the college of foreign languages of Henan Institute of Technology. The author is responsible for the Business English course of the class, which has twice a week. The study lasted for 5 months from March 2021 to July 2021.

3.2 Problem and diagnosis

At the end of the first semester, the author found that some students have good intelligence and practical ability, but lack motivation and interest in the study. Most of them have weak English foundations, unclear expressions of basic sentences, less interaction with teachers, and are timid to take the initiative to answer questions. Especially in the oral presentation part, when the students showed on the stage, their language expression was not clear, their body movements were stiff, and they lacked basic computer operation skills, and their overall performance was unsatisfactory.

3.3 Research questions

The author interviewed several students randomly. The main reason for the poor oral presentation ability is the lack of exercise opportunities and effective evaluation and guidance. Based on the above reasons, the author attempts to use action research to solve the following problems.

RQ1: through teachers' intervention in the classroom and a variety of formative assessment activities, could formative assessment take effect in the development of students' oral presentation?

RQ2: If students' oral presentation performance could be improved, which dimension has been improved the most among the five ones?

4. Overall Action Research

The author has formulated a research scheme based on the role of formative assessment in the cultivation of oral presentation, as follows: (1) formulating the first round (the first month) action research; (2)

implementing the first round of action; (3) collecting data and evaluating the performance; (4) concluding the results of the first round of action and finding out problems; (5) improving teaching methods and formulating the second round (the second month) action research; (6) implementing the second round of action; (7) collecting and analyzing data; (8) concluding the results of the second round of action and improving teaching methods; (9) conducting the third round (the third month) and the fourth round (the fourth month) of action research in the same approach.

4.1 The first round of action research

Considering that some freshmen are not proficient in Microsoft Office software at the beginning of the new semester, the author began the action research in the second semester. The topic in the first round of oral presentation is selected from the “Dilemma & Decision” part of unit 1 in Comprehensive Course II (Wang Lifei). The author requires each student to prepare 5-minutes presentation with English slides.

4.1.1 Preliminary observation and discovery

In this oral presentation task, 35% of the students did not prepare slides because they had no idea how to make it; other problems include inaccurate pronunciation of words, too low voice or stuttering, stage fright, and too fast/slow speech; issues also include lacking interaction with students, using machine translation without proofreading; the basic computer operation skill has not been mastered for students.

4.1.2 Teacher reflection

In order to develop students’ self-evaluation capability in oral presentation tasks, the author designed a questionnaire (see Annex 1). The questionnaire has 5 dimensions and 20 questions in the form of a Likert scale with high reliability (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.913$). As shown in Table 1, the students’ self-assessment scores in the five dimensions are low, with an average of about 2 points. The author takes the scores in the first round of oral presentation as the pre-test results.

Dimension	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
L	1.00	2.25	1.71	.282
P	1.25	2.50	2.01	.260
B	1.00	3.00	2.26	.472
C	1.00	2.75	2.13	.453
I	1.25	2.75	2.01	.412

Table 1: Descriptive statistics (N=60)

The author interviewed several students at random. Their self-assessment of oral presentation performance is as follows: “when collecting information about the presentation topic, I searched the relevant content on the search engine, copied and pasted it directly without any deep thinking”; “there are few opportunities to show on stage in high school, and it has not formed a personal style yet, which is difficult to mobilize the enthusiasm of students’ interaction, thus deepening the stage fright; the task is not fully prepared after class, and there are some situations like hasty and perfunctory.” The author realizes that students’ self-assessment of oral presentation is not high.

4.2 *The second round of action research*

4.2.1 *Adjusted plan*

The author made the core scale of oral presentation (see Annex 2). The scale has 5 dimensions and 20 sub-dimensions, with a full score of 100. The scale can help students master the specific dimensions of oral presentation, and can be used for self-assessment and peer assessment in the process of practice, so as to promote self-reflection in five dimensions; the author requires students to learn the basic operation of Microsoft office software independently; the author sends videos of celebrity speeches to students and asks them to imitate the speeches; the author also encourages students to discuss offline; the author has established an online growth portfolio to collect slides, videos, audio and pictures of students' to help record their progress and facilitate students to review their performance at any time.

4.2.2 *The topic in the second round of oral presentation*

The second round of presentation is based on unit2 “brand.” The author requires students to collect 1–2 brands they like or pay more attention to the objectives of this unit, and conduct an English presentation for 5–10 minutes.

4.2.3 *Data collection, analysis, and assessment*

Before this round of presentations, the author gave all the students a 20-minute training. The training content was the scale of oral presentation ability. Table 2 shows the scores of the five dimensions in the second round. It can be seen that the average score of information technology (I2) increased to 11.52 from 10.16 (I1), and the average scores of the other four dimensions did not change significantly. Table 3 shows the t-test results of students' oral presentation scores in the first and second rounds. The score of information technology is statistically significant ($P < 0.01$), indicating that students' scores on information technology improve rapidly at the end of the second round.

Dimension	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
L1	6.00	12.00	8.99	1.45
P1	6.3	12.8	9.15	1.48
C1	6.0	10.2	8.14	1.05
B1	6.4	12.3	8.56	1.54
I1	7.50	14.00	10.16	1.42
L2	6.30	12.00	9.06	1.30
P2	6.0	13.0	9.02	1.41
C2	6.4	10.0	8.19	1.07
B2	6.5	12.0	8.59	1.41
I2	8.80	15.00	11.52	1.47

Table 2: Descriptive statistics in the second round of oral presentation (N=60)

Pairs	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Lower	Upper			
L1-L2	-.24	.12	-6.39	59	.494
P1-P2	-.08	.33	1.21	59	.233
C1-C2	-.15	.06	-.90	59	.372
B1-B2	-.18	.12	-.40	59	.688
I1-I2	-1.59	-1.11	-11.44	59	.000**

Table3: Paired samples test

** P<0.01

4.3 The third round of action research

4.3.1 The topic in the third round of oral presentation

The topic in this round comes from the “communication” part of unit 3. The author asked students to prepare the oral task about modern communication methods or communication software. After class, the author interviewed several students, and several of them commented on other peers that “I like their slides design very much. The page is simple and concise”; “Some students are very confident, which I need to learn from them.” The author found that the perspective of peer assessment is closer to the actual needs of students, which not only promotes the students’ reflection but also promotes the accuracy of self-assessment.

4.3.2 Data collection, analysis, and assessment

In this round of presentation, the author stipulates that each student has 10 minutes, and 60% of the students have not completed it within the specified time; time control in public speech needs to be strengthened; 35% of the students lacked logical analysis of the content displayed. For example, in terms of brand comparison, they lacked comparative analysis of commonness and individuality, but simply listed the two brands. In this round, the author joined the real-time Q & R part, and some students’ on-site response was poor.

4.3.3 Data collection, analysis, and assessment

The author uses SPSS 26 software to conduct a sample paired t-test on the scores from peer assessment in the third round and the second round. The statistical results show that there are significant differences in the scores of the three dimensions of public speech, business knowledge, and information technology (see Table 4).

Pairs	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Lower	Upper			
L3-L2	-.070	.15	.78	59	.439
P3-P2	.72	1.13	9.15	59	.000**
C3-C2	-.03	.24	1.51	59	.141
B3-B2	.18	.36	6.30	59	.000**
I3-I2	.82	1.19	11.38	59	.000**

Table4: Paired samples test

** P<0.01

4.3.4 Teacher reflection

From this round, the author builds the online charts of self-assessment, which is convenient for students to record their own problems and reflection in time. At the same time, by shooting a 5-minute short video, students could record their performance, and accurately evaluate themselves. When giving students feedback, the author pays attention to the tone, attitude, and way to promote the effectiveness, make students easy to accept the feedback, and gives students space to discuss their problems and improvement, promote students' mastery of the expected learning objectives, and help the author understand the changes of students' performance.

4.4 The fourth round of action research

4.4.1 Adjusted plan

In view of the students' low enthusiasm in preparing tasks, the author joined the reward and punishment system, made on-site in-depth comments on each student's performance, and gave detailed feedback information and suggestions. The feedback mainly includes the students' problems in five dimensions.

4.4.2 The topic in the fourth round of oral presentation

The topic of the fourth unit is logistics. After learning this unit, the tasks of students are to choose topics around the theme of logistics. It must be creative and logical. The students with the highest score will receive prizes.

4.4.3 Data collection, analysis and assessment

The scores made by peer assessment in the third round and fourth round were calculated by SPSS 26. The statistical results showed that there were significant differences in the scores of the five dimensions (see Table 5), and the average values of the five dimensions were improved. The results show that there is a correlation between the assessment given by teachers and that given by students (see Table 6). The correlation coefficients of teachers' scoring and students' scoring (T/S) in the two dimensions of language expression and critical thinking are 0.652 and 0.785 respectively, which are significantly correlated at the level of 0.01. The correlation coefficients $|R|$ of scores on business knowledge and information technology ability made by teacher and student (T/S) are 0.92 and 0.901 respectively, which are highly correlated between 0.8–1.0. This also shows that the scores given by peers are reliable and consistent with the scores given by teachers.

Dimension	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Lower	Upper			
L4-L3	.55	1.40	4.66	59	.000**
P4-P3	.98	1.65	8.01	59	.000**
C4-C3	1.35	2.20	8.55	59	.000**
B4-B3	.48	1.01	5.79	59	.000**
I4-I3	.61	1.28	5.77	59	.000**

Table 5: Paired samples test

* * P<0.01

T/S	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
L	.652**	.000**
P	.923**	.000**
C	.785**	.000**
B	.932**	.000**
I	.901**	.000**

Table 6: The correlation coefficients

** P<0.01

4.4.4 Teacher reflection

From this round of scores, we can see that the appropriate rewards can stimulate students' learning motivation. At the same time, the author also interviewed several students. "After several rounds of oral tasks, we have always exposed our shortcomings to each other, seriously reflect on the feedback put forward by the teacher, consciously correct the problems existing in the presentation, and feel that our self-confidence has improved. There is no stage fright anymore, and the performance is much more stable." "I am familiar with the basic operation of the computer and can make slides independently. Now I can smoothly display the prepared content and have realized the transformation from passive learning to active learning."

After the fourth round of the presentation task, the author sent out the questionnaire again. The results show that the average value of the five dimensions has increased by nearly 1–2 points compared with that at the beginning (Table 7), indicating that the students have improved their self-assessment of oral presentation ability.

Dimension	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
L	2.75	4.25	3.33	.34
P	2.50	3.50	3.04	.26
B	2.50	4.00	3.19	.37
C	2.50	5.00	3.78	.54
I	3.00	5.00	4.03	.52

Table7: Descriptive statistics(N=60)

5. Conclusion

This action research allows students to actively participate in learning, and transfers the decision-making choices from teachers to students in combination with goal setting, and develops a mechanism to evaluate achievements and progress. After four rounds of action research, the author found that with the help of formative assessment methods, such as video recordings, scale, on-site oral feedback, portfolio, and giving students detailed and timely feedback (from students themselves, peers, and the teacher), teachers' and students' self-assessment and peer assessment could play a synergistic role in promoting the five core dimensions of oral presentation.

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Questionnaire

Dear students,

Through evaluating your own performance on the oral presentation, you could improve your self-assessment literacy and autonomous learning ability. We want to know your self-assessment ability of oral presentation through this questionnaire. This questionnaire is anonymous. Please answer carefully according to your true views. Thank you for your support!

Please answer the following questions (1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively correspond to "strongly disagree", "disagree", "not necessarily", "agree", and "strongly agree".)

**Annex I**

Number	Questions	1	2	3	4	5
1	During theoral presentation, I can clearly express what I want to say.					
2	I can choose words properly when I am doing a presentation.					
3	I feel that what I say is unambiguous when I am doing a presentation.					
4	I have logical thinking when I am doinga presentation.					
5	I don't feel stage fright when I am doing a presentation.					
6	I have natural body language when I am doinga presentation.					
7	I have the ability to control my time when I am doinga presentation.					
8	I have natural pronunciation and intonation when I am doing a presentation.					
9	I have made some researcheson the business background.					
10	I have improved my communication skills through oral presentations.					
11	It cultivated the habit of paying attention to business news for me.					
12	I have improved my understanding of cross-cultural communication through oral presentations.					
13	In the preparation stage, I can conceive my project in a clear and orderly manner.					
14	When otherstudents are making presentations, I am comparing and analyzing the problems existing in mine.					
15	I am always confident about my presentation task.					
16	Ihave made deep thinking when I was preparing the presentation task.					
17	I have mastered the basic operation ofcomputers after finishing an oral presentation.					
18	I have improved my research ability after finishing the oral presentation.					
19	I can make slides independently now.					
20	I can quickly screen effective information when I am preparing the presentation task.					

Annex 2

Oral Presentation Scale		
Core dimension	Sub-dimension	Scores(1-5, Increased order)
Language expression	Express clearly	
	Well worded	
	Express without ambiguity	
	Logical expression	
Public speech	Stage fright	
	Body language	
	Time control	
	Phonetic intonation	
Critical thinking	Conception of task	
	The ability of comparative analysis	
	Confidence	
	Broad and deep topic	
Business knowledge	Business knowledge reserve	
	Communication skills	
	Cross-cultural communication skills	
	Business news reserve	
Information technology	Basic operation skills of computer	
	Information collection	
	Slides-making skills	
	Ability to obtain information	

(Editor: Bonnie Wang)