

Intensive Speaking Classes in a Japanese University: An Attitudinal Study

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Introduction

This paper is going to analyse the results of a questionnaire given to two classes at the same university at the end of the second semester in January 2009 after the students had completed a 9-week course of intensive speaking practice. The questionnaire was designed to elicit student attitudes to both their own performance and the performance and attitude of their fellow students.

Discussion has been ongoing for many years on the role of the learner in the EFL/ESL classroom. There are some scholars who have called for students to take a more active role in both deciding what they are going to learn and just how they are going to go about learning it. This entails them taking a more active role in making decisions such as sharing responsibilities and initiating activities (Dubin, F. and E. Olshtain, 1990). By allowing students to control the planning and the development of lessons, they can choose subject matter, which will interest them more, decide what aspects of language and content they wish to learn and how they will attain their goals. Another very important aspect of allowing students more responsibility in deciding what will be taught ensures that the language used by the students will better suit the students' linguistic abilities (Porter, 1985). In the early stages of language learning, students will only profit from the exposure to the language being learned by having some control over it (Thomson, 1993).

There are some students who view group work and increased student participation in classroom decision-making as a sign of instructor disinterest in teaching the class and perhaps even laziness on the part of the instructor. Another common complaint

voiced by students when doing group work is that they are listening to English that contains some or many errors, and they fail to get adequate feedback from the instructor on those errors (Assinder, 1990). These fears and objections can be overcome if the instructor clearly defines the overall goal or goals for doing a specific exercise i.e., group work and by explaining the rationale for having students take a more active role in classroom decision-making. Classroom tasks can be broken down into certain spoken skill acts such as reporting, negotiating, clarifying and problem solving (Grognet, 1997). The instructor can give the students confidence that he or she is not just sitting back and relaxing while students go about their tasks, by moving around the room listening in on group discussions and to a limited extent participating in a non-intrusive way. Lastly, the instructor needs to give feedback to students after the tasks have been completed. Long & Porter (1985) state that students feel more motivated and feel less pressure when they are allowed to work in smaller groups.

Project

At the beginning of the second semester in the 2008-09 academic school year, the instructor gave students a paper explaining the procedures and went over it with them so that everyone would understand exactly what was expected of them.

First the instructor put students into groups of three. The names were chosen at random; however, to ensure that there was a fair distribution of male and female students throughout the groups, the instructor asked the students to write their names on a piece of paper and put the folded paper in one of two piles at the front of the room. The instructor then chose a paper from each pile in turn, read the name to the class and assigned each student to a group.

Once the students had assembled in their groups, each student was handed a piece of paper on which the schedule for the following ten weeks would be made. An example of the paper handed out to students is below. The instructor has filled in topics and names for easier understanding of what was required of the students. They had to decide when they were going to do their three group presentations and what the topics

would be.

Schedule	Topic	Group Presenter	Class Presenter
Week 1	Music	Tanaka	
Week 2	Movies	Yamada	Tanaka
Week 3	Recycling	Harada	Yamada

The group presenters were told that they had to prepare a short presentation to be given to their group each class, which should last about 3–5 minutes. They would be required to do this three times during the semester. They were instructed not to write out a speech or essay, but rather to prepare a document in point form. This was to stop students reading for several reasons. When students read their voices tend to drop, they maintain no eye contact with their group members and they tend to rush through the paper. The instructor wanted the group presenters to engage their group members by maintaining eye contact, speaking slowly and in a loud and clear voice. This would also help to keep the type of vocabulary used to a level equal to that of the other students' listening levels. When students write an essay for example, they use much more difficult vocabulary and structures than they would when they are speaking freely.

Each student had to do a group presentation three times during the semester. The points awarded for this were four points per time for a total of 12 points for the three. The instructor told the students that their preparations would be looked at before the group presentations began and points would be awarded at that time. Some readers may wonder why as many as 12 points were awarded for this, but the instructor felt that the success of the discussion would largely depend on how well each student prepared for their group presentation. By awarding this many points, students would be encouraged to do a good job.

Students were told that as the group presenters were giving their group presentations, the instructor would walk around the room observing each group and assign

points for the group presentation which was worth five points. The points would be based on how well the presenters engaged their group members and the length of time spent doing it.

After the group presentations were over, the group presenters were told that they would still be in charge of the discussion in terms of making sure everyone had a chance to speak. This would ensure that when silent periods ensued they needed to be able to get the discussion going again. This would also be reflected in their scores for their group presentations.

Group discussion would follow with all members required to participate fully for up to 25 minutes. Students were told that actions such as speaking Japanese, checking mobile phones, staring out the window, lack of participation, etc would result in a loss of points. Points awarded for the discussion were five points per time equaling a total of 30 points for six times. Students who were group presenters would not be eligible for these points.

After the group discussions were completed, students were told that they would all have 15 minutes to write a report covering what their group had discussed. Students wanted to know how many words would be required so the instructor told them between 120 and 150 words. Points awarded for this section were three points over six times for a total of 18 points.

Starting from week two, before group presentations began, the group presenters for the week before were told that they would be required to give a presentation in front of the whole class. Students were told to write their names on the whiteboard when they came into the room. Students were given the criteria for the grading of their whole class presentations during the first week of classes. The whole class presentations would be worth eight points each for a total of 24 points. Students were given the same sheet as the instructor would use and told that they would be required to give a score to each presenter and that that score sheet would be collected at the end of the 10-week period.

Demographic Summary

A	Total	B	Total	C	Total
Male	14	Male	16	Male	30
Female	21	Female	15	Female	36
All	35	All	31	All	66

Two second-year classes from a four-year university took part in this project/questionnaire. The first class will be designated from here on as class A and the second class will be designated as class B. The third designation, C, is the combined total for both A and B classes. Female students made up two-thirds of class A, but there was an almost equal number of male and female students in class B. Both classes had more than 30 students in each class. Both classes were of a similar English level though some of the males in class A had a lower level of English and some were from outside the main group i.e., third year students or repeaters.

Questionnaire Construction

There are certain things that need to be taken into consideration when working on items to be included in a questionnaire. They are: avoid using difficult words and terminology, make sure that each item only relates to one issue (Allwright & Bailey, 1991), refrain from using words like often and sometimes as these kind of words are interpreted differently by different people leading to unreliable results (Busch, 1993). Items need to be worded in such a way that every agreement is not shown by a response of 6. The first two were largely negated by the fact that the items were translated into Japanese and given to the students to answer in that format. All issues except the last one were addressed in the questionnaire. Unfortunately, all of the items show agreement to be in the higher numbered range.

Many researchers use the five-point Likert rating scale to allow people the chance to avoid giving extreme opinions on a particular subject (Schwartz, 1987). This

researcher has in the past used the five-point Likert scale when making up questionnaires, but decided to use a six-point scale to force people 'off the fence' and make a decision one way or the other while still retaining the option of avoiding extreme positions. There are cultures that prefer more neutral responses to issues rather than take a stand thereby giving data that is not truly reflective of their true feelings (Reid, 1990).

In this questionnaire; 1 signifies overwhelming disagreement, 2 indicates reasonably strong disagreement, 3 signifies slight disagreement, 4 indicates slight agreement, 5 signifies reasonably strong agreement and 6 indicates overwhelming agreement.

Statistical Decisions

The two classes in this study are shown in the tables as A (class A) and B (class B). C refers to the combined score for both classes. The numerical number following the class designation refers to the item number on the questionnaire. M stands for male and F stands for female. The combining of 1, 2, 3 percentage scores, combined disagreement rating (CDR) and 4, 5, 6 percentage scores, combined agreement rating (CAR) will show the general attitude of the students (Gronlund 1976). Also the combining of 1 and 2 (combined strong disagreement rating=CSDR), 3 by itself (mild disagreement rating=MDR), 4 by itself (mild agreement rating=MAR) and the combining of 5 and 6 (combined strong agreement rating=CSAR) percentage scores will further show general trends in terms of strong attitudes i.e., agreement or disagreement and mild attitudes either in favour or against the individual items.

1. I Got to Practice Speaking English

Background

Students were required to discuss the topic that a member of their group had chosen for 25 minutes. As there were three members per group, this should have translated into just over eight minutes per person. Then added onto that were about 10 minutes for group presentations and about 10 minutes for class presentations. This

means that each student should have spoken for around 90 minutes by the time the nine-week schedule had been concluded.

1	1	2	3	4	5	6	CDR	CAR	CSDR	MDR	MAR	CSAR
A (M%)	7	0	36	14	21	21	43	56	7	36	14	42
A (F%)	0	5	10	24	48	14	15	86	5	10	24	62
A (T%)	3	3	20	20	37	17	26	74	6	20	20	54
B (M%)	0	0	13	19	25	44	13	88	0	13	19	69
B (F%)	0	7	13	40	13	27	20	80	7	13	40	40
B (T%)	0	3	13	29	19	35	16	83	3	13	29	54
C (M%)	3	0	23	17	23	33	26	73	0	13	17	56
C (F%)	0	6	11	31	33	19	17	83	6	13	31	52
C (T%)	2	3	17	24	29	26	22	79	5	13	24	55

Results

The overall results as shown in C indicate agreement with the item statement. Having said that, a look at the individual percentage scores shows that there was a difference between males in both classes. Males in class A had a CDR rating of 43 per cent as opposed to the males in class B who registered a very low CDR rating of 13 per cent. This group had the highest score, 44 per cent, for rating 6 of all the groups. Females in both classes registered high CAR scores, though the MAR score was the highest indicating that the agreement with the statement was not so strong. The CAR rating for three of the four sub-groups was over 80 per cent.

Analysis

The males in class A did not feel that they got to practise their English as much as the males in class B or the females in class A and B. The males in class A tended to be lower level students in comparison to their female counterparts. Also, the difference in numbers between males and females in the class meant that nearly every group had two females to every male. The males may have experienced some difficulty in

taking part in discussions for varying reasons. The balance in numbers between males and females in class B meant that half the groups had two males to one female. This may have given them more confidence in speaking up. The females in both classes tended to be more confident and willing to speak in their groups.

Implications

An instructor needs to take a lot of factors into consideration when putting students in to groups. The male-female ratio, English ability and individual characteristics are aspects that need to be considered. Therefore, it is advisable that this type of activity be done in the second semester, as the instructor will be much better acquainted with the students involved. If an instructor wishes to do this activity in the first semester, it would be better to allow some time to pass so that the instructor can get to know the students before deciding on the make up of individual groups.

2. My Speaking Ability Improved

Background

As stated in the Background section for item one, students should have spoken for about an hour and a half each after the nine-week intensive speaking activity had been completed. However, due to various reasons that will be discussed below, this differed greatly between groups and students.

2	1	2	3	4	5	6	CDR	CAR	CSDR	MDR	MAR	CSAR
A (M%)	0	36	14	29	14	7	50	50	36	14	29	21
A (F%)	0	19	24	52	5	0	43	57	19	24	52	5
A (T%)	0	26	20	43	9	3	46	55	26	20	43	12
B (M%)	6	0	6	50	28	13	12	91	6	6	50	41
B (F%)	0	13	27	33	20	7	40	60	13	27	33	27
B (T%)	3	6	16	42	23	10	25	75	9	16	42	33
C (M%)	3	2	17	18	42	15	22	75	5	17	18	57
C (F%)	0	17	25	44	11	3	42	58	17	25	44	14
C (T%)	2	17	18	42	15	6	37	63	19	18	42	21

Results

The CAR for the total combined group was 63 per cent for this item. When we look at the CSDR and the CSAR we see scores of around 20 per cent. The MAR is over 40 per cent, which means that agreement with this item statement was not overly strong. A look at the individual percentage scores for each class shows that class A showed agreement, but not overwhelmingly so. Class B had a 75 per cent CAR rating, which was 20 per cent higher than class A. The CSAR rating was also much higher for class B (33 per cent) than A class (12 per cent). The sub-groups depict an interesting picture. The males in class B agreed with the statement overwhelmingly, with a 91 per cent CAR. The CSAR was above 40 per cent alone. In contrast the males in class A were evenly divided on the item with a 50-50 split between CDR and CAR. Thirty-six per cent of the males in that class strongly disagreed with the item statement. The females in class A had a very low CSAR (five per cent), but a MAR of just over 50 per cent. Though the CAR figure for class B females was similar to class A females, class B had a much higher CSAR (27 per cent).

Analysis

There were some males in class A who were not overly co-operative and were frequently late or absent from class. There may have been three or four of them in total. So the low agreement rating on this item may in part be due to these students in that class. The males in class B showed the highest agreement rating of all sub-groups so the difference cannot be put down to gender. One problem with this item statement is the wording. The scores by females in both classes were very similar. It is surprising that they did not in fact have a higher agreement rating for this item, especially the females in class B, as they tended to speak out and became quite involved in their discussions. Perhaps 'ability' should have been written as 'fluency'. Ability could have been interpreted as e.g., grammatical correctness by some, speed of speaking by others or ease of speaking by someone else. It is also possible that students could be their harshest critics and may expect a bigger improvement from themselves, and this may be

unrealistic given the once a week meeting of the class and the short time period that it was held in.

Implications

As mentioned above, the problem may be partly in the wording of the item statement. To test this, in any future questionnaire in a similar class, the wording needs to be more specific and less interpretive. Also the instructor may need to sit down with each group for a period of time each week to get a sense of any improvement that the students may make. The problem that would need to be addressed here is how to assign points for all the students' performance in general while the instructor's attention is focused on one group at a time. The schedule for the intensive speaking session could be increased from nine weeks to twelve weeks to give students more exposure time.

3. I Spoke English Most of the Time

Background

Students were asked to speak English during the 30-minute intensive speaking time period. This was reinforced by the allotting of points for their performance in this area. If they spoke Japanese they would lose points. Most of the students appeared to speak English most of the time. Appeared to be is the optimum word as the rooms were quite small for the number of students in the classes. Luckily there was another, bigger classroom open and class A was moved there. This allowed for groups to be separated by several metres. However, in class B's case, no larger rooms were open at that time slot so groups had very little space between them. The instructor was able to better monitor the amount of English used in class A than class B.

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3	1	2	3	4	5	6	CDR	CAR	CSDR	MDR	MAR	CSAR
A (M%)	0	21	29	29	14	7	50	50	21	29	29	21
A (F%)	0	10	14	43	24	10	24	77	10	14	43	34
A (T%)	0	14	20	37	20	9	34	66	14	20	37	29
B (M%)	0	13	6	50	13	19	19	82	13	6	50	32
B (F%)	0	13	40	27	7	13	53	47	13	40	27	20
B (T%)	0	13	23	39	10	16	36	65	13	23	39	26
C (M%)	0	17	17	40	13	13	34	66	17	17	40	26
C (F%)	0	11	25	36	17	11	36	64	11	25	36	28
C (T%)	0	14	21	38	15	12	35	65	14	21	38	27

Results

The CAR for the combined classes was almost 66 per cent or two-thirds of all the students involved in the study. There is no appreciable difference between male and female respondents in this category either. There was no consistency between males or females across classes. Females in class A had a CAR score of 77 per cent as opposed to 47 per cent in class B. The same can be seen for the males as well. Those in class A scored 51 per cent while those in class B scored 82 per cent. The only sub-group to show a higher MDR (40 per cent) than MAR (27 per cent) was the females of group B. The males of group A were evenly divided between MDR and MAR (29 per cent each).

Analysis

The sub-groups of class A showed very different opinions on this issue as did the sub-groups in class B. While a reasonable guess as to the reason or reasons for the scores given by the males in class A can be put forward and those in class B to a lesser extent, it is less clear as to why the females have scored the way they have. As said before, there were some students who were not interested in making an effort in this activity and it is those students who have influenced the score in that sub-group. Nearly all the males in class B were willing to participate fully. The females in class

B were of a slightly higher linguistic level than the other sub-groups and, therefore, may have found it easier to converse for longer periods than the other sub-groups. The results for the females in class B are totally surprising. It is very difficult to see why they have scored so low when they appeared to speak English most of the time like the rest of the subject body.

Implications

One thing that must be done before this kind of activity is attempted again is to make sure that a large enough room is available. If there were 30 students in the class, a room that could seat 90 or more would be better. This will enable sufficient space between each group and some privacy for them. Also, as students are engaged in communication the noise level goes up quite appreciably, which can make it difficult to hear what your group members are saying when you are sitting right next to another group. One issue with this score is that we assume the low rating is due to students speaking Japanese, but upon reflection it may be that they were silent for lengthy periods of time while other students were speaking. In the future it may be better to present the item as 'I did not speak much Japanese.' Of course there are inherent problems with this as well as it does not preclude them saying little of anything during the discussion and still scoring highly on the item. More thought is needed on the wording of this item for any future research.

4. My Group Members Spoke English Most of the Time

Background

Students were told that not only must they speak English, but they must also participate equally in the group discussions. Students with higher linguistic skills and/or more outgoing personalities were asked to consider the other members of their group and encourage everyone to participate fully in the discussion.

4	1	2	3	4	5	6	CDR	CAR	CSDR	MDR	MAR	CSAR
A (M%)	0	7	21	36	29	7	28	72	7	21	36	36
A (F%)	0	0	14	19	62	5	14	86	0	14	19	67
A (T%)	0	3	17	26	49	6	20	81	3	17	26	55
B (M%)	0	0	0	25	56	19	0	100	0	0	25	75
B (F%)	0	0	27	27	27	20	27	74	0	27	27	47
B (T%)	0	0	13	26	42	19	13	87	0	13	26	61
C (M%)	0	3	10	30	43	13	13	86	3	10	30	56
C (F%)	0	0	19	22	47	11	19	80	0	19	22	58
C (T%)	0	2	15	26	45	12	17	83	2	15	26	57

Results

The CAR scores for this item were all high with the males in class B scoring 100 per cent. Class A females had a CAR score of 86 per cent. Even the males in class A had a CAR in excess of 70 per cent as did the females in class B. The only sub-group to register any score in the CSDR was the class A males. The highest MDR was scored by the females in class B (27 per cent). The sub-group with the highest MAR was the males in class A with 36 per cent. Both the males in group B and the females in group A registered more than two-thirds in the CSAR section. The overall CAR score for all sub-groups was 83 per cent.

Analysis

It would seem that the students were more generous when rating their group members than they were when they rated their own performance on this issue. It would seem that most students were satisfied with the amount of English spoken by their group members. There is a different gender in each class scoring higher than the other. In class A that is the females and in class B the males. This has been happening consistently throughout the first four items discussed so far. Class A is understandable, but class B is not. Why the boys are consistently scoring higher CARs than the females in this class is not easy to understand. Could the female students have

higher expectations of themselves than the males in this class? A different set of questions on this or a follow up questionnaire would be needed to find out why.

Implications

Another set of questions seeking to find out what students aspirations are in English and what they expect of others may need to be asked in order to try to explain some of the results that seem impossible to answer. Perhaps in future studies of this kind it might be advisable to try to work out strategies that will enable the avoidance of one gender dominating another in a situation like this. How this could be done or even if it were possible would need closer attention.

5. I Got Practice Listening to English in My Group

5	1	2	3	4	5	6	CDR	CAR	CSDR	MDR	MAR	CSAR
A (M%)	0	7	14	71	7	0	21	78	7	14	71	7
A (F%)	0	0	10	38	38	14	10	90	0	10	38	52
A (T%)	0	3	11	51	26	9	14	86	3	11	51	35
B (M%)	0	0	0	37	50	13	0	100	0	0	37	63
B (F%)	0	0	13	40	33	13	13	86	0	13	40	46
B (T%)	0	0	6	39	42	13	6	94	0	6	39	55
C (M%)	0	3	7	53	30	7	10	90	3	7	53	37
C (F%)	0	0	11	39	36	14	11	89	0	11	39	50
C (T%)	0	2	9	45	33	11	11	89	2	9	45	44

Background

All members of the groups were encouraged to speak up so that no one person would dominate the discussion. So in theory everyone should have spent a lot of time listening to what their group members had to say on a variety of topics. The instructor asked quiet students to speak up and more dominant speakers to try to bring others into the discussion several times.

Results

All sub-groups had CAR scores of over 75 per cent on this item. Only one sub-group had a CDR higher than 20 per cent and that was the males in class A (21 per cent). The males in class B had the highest CAR of 100 per cent. The next highest CAR was registered by the females in class A with 90 per cent. The CAR scores were almost identical between males and females in the combined sub-group category. The males in class A had the largest percentage of students in the MAR category with 71 per cent, considerably higher than the other three sub-groups. In fact, the other three sub-groups registered higher CSAR scores.

Analysis

From these scores it seems that the vast majority of the respondents thought that they got practice listening to their group speaking English. The level of English of most of the students was similar and, therefore, the input in the discussions would have been comprehensible to most of them. The respondents who registered slight disagreement with the item statement might have been in groups with members who had a much higher linguistic competence. They would not have been able to follow what was being said and, therefore, would not have got as much benefit from the exercise. On the other hand, some may have been highly competent English-speakers and were in groups with students who did not have as high a skill level. They may feel that they were not challenged enough.

Implications

Students seem to feel that they did in fact get listening practice even though they were listening to English spoken by non-natives. This seems to disprove one of the complaints that students are said to make when asked to work in groups. Perhaps in the future it will be prudent to try to make sure that students in a group are of a similar linguistic level, though this may not always be possible to implement completely. This is one reason why it is imperative that the instructor gets to know each student's

linguistic level and personality before implementing this activity. This will help ensure some sort of balance in most of the groups.

6. My Listening Ability Improved

Background

Students would have spent more time listening than speaking during the class. This would have included listening to the instructor, whole class presentations, group presentations and group discussions.

6	1	2	3	4	5	6	CDR	CAR	CSDR	MDR	MAR	CSAR
A (M%)	0	7	29	50	0	14	36	64	7	29	50	14
A (F%)	0	0	29	52	14	5	29	71	0	29	52	19
A (T%)	0	3	29	51	9	9	32	69	3	29	51	18
B (M%)	0	6	6	31	56	0	6	87	6	6	31	56
B (F%)	0	0	27	33	27	13	27	73	0	27	33	40
B (T%)	0	3	16	32	42	6	19	80	3	16	32	48
C (M%)	0	7	17	40	30	7	24	77	7	17	40	37
C (F%)	0	0	28	44	19	8	28	71	0	28	44	27
C (T%)	0	3	23	42	24	8	26	74	3	23	42	32

Results

The combined male sub-group had a higher CAR score than the combined female sub-group by six per cent (77 to 71 per cent). Both female sub-groups had similar CARs, class A with 71 per cent and class B with 73 per cent. There was a difference between the scores of the males in both classes with the highest CSAR score being registered by the males in class B, 87 per cent. Class A males agreed somewhat with the item statement (64 per cent), but were much less emphatic about it. The females in class B had a higher CSAR rating than MAR rating (40 and 33 per cent respectively). The only other sub-group to do that was the class B males with 56 and 31 per cent respectively.

Analysis

Nearly three-quarters of the respondents thought that their listening ability improved during the eight-week session. Students were subjected to a lot of listening during this time and it is not surprising that they would have felt some improvement. There were 26 per cent of the respondents who stated that they did not believe their listening improved during this time though. This could be because they may not have seen any value in listening to non-native speakers or it may have been because they could not follow what was being said. This could be the result of the speakers around them speaking broken English or English too complicated for them to follow. This may be especially true of presentations in front of the class and to some degree group presentations as some students were reading more than speaking in spite of being asked not to.

Implications

We see some need for members of each group to be of a similar English level to ensure that all students can participate fully in the class. The content of the discussions may need to be controlled to some degree also to ensure that difficult topics do not stop some students from participating fully. However, a majority of students felt that their listening improved from group work with non-native English speakers so basically the format of this exercise seems to have been validated overall.

7. I Listened to the Whole Class Presentations

Background

Students were given a sheet at the beginning of the eight-week intensive speaking course and asked to give a score to each whole class presenter every week. This usually meant between eight and ten presentations at the beginning of each class. Students would write their name on the board and the instructor would then call them randomly to go to the front of the room and give their presentation.

7	1	2	3	4	5	6	CDR	CAR	CSDR	MDR	MAR	CSAR
A (M%)	0	21	14	29	36	0	35	65	21	14	29	36
A (F%)	0	0	10	33	43	14	10	90	0	10	33	77
A (T%)	0	9	11	31	40	9	20	80	9	11	31	49
B (M%)	0	6	6	44	25	19	12	88	6	6	44	44
B (F%)	0	0	0	53	27	20	0	100	0	0	53	47
B (T%)	0	3	3	48	26	19	6	93	3	3	48	45
C (M%)	0	13	10	37	30	10	23	77	13	10	37	40
C (F%)	0	0	6	42	36	17	6	95	0	6	42	53
C (T%)	0	6	8	39	33	14	14	76	6	8	39	47

Results

The female sub-groups had higher CAR scores than the male sub-groups with scores of 90 per cent and 100 per cent for class A and B. Class B males also scored high in this category with 88 per cent. The class A males had a majority of them showing agreement (65 per cent), but not as high as the other three sub-groups. The class A female sub-group had the highest CSAR score of all the sub-groups with over three-quarters of them choosing this category. In fact, no other sub-group scored above 50 per cent in this category. No females in either class indicated any strong disagreement with this item. The only sub-group to show any real strong disagreement was the males in class A with 21 per cent.

Analysis

More than three-quarters of the respondents said that they listened closely to class presentations with nearly 50 per cent showing very strong agreement. There were a lot of presentations, one after another, and this can cause students to switch off now and then because of overload. The instructor also noticed that the degree to which students listened had a lot to do with how well the presenter spoke and what they spoke about. Students who spoke slowly and clearly were listened to much more than people who raced through their presentation with voices lowered. Also, presenters who looked up

at the audience tended to get more attention paid to them.

Implications

Precise guidelines on what students should do and should not do when presenting need to be formulated so that students are aware of what points are awarded for. This was done to a large degree. But in the future more attention needs to be devoted to this. On the topic of paying attention, one method that could be implemented to make sure that students pay attention to the presentations is to have a series of questions that are asked after the presentation has finished or they could even be given out to them before the presentation begins. Also, fewer class presentations could be done at one time to lessen the overload that students experience from so much input.

8. I learned New Vocabulary in my Group Discussions

8	1	2	3	4	5	6	CDR	CAR	CSDR	MDR	MAR	CSAR
A (M%)	0	14	14	43	15	14	28	72	14	14	43	29
A (F%)	0	0	19	43	29	10	19	82	0	19	43	39
A (T%)	0	6	17	43	23	11	23	77	6	17	43	34
B (M%)	0	6	19	31	25	19	25	75	6	19	31	44
B (F%)	7	0	13	47	27	7	20	81	7	13	47	34
B (T%)	3	3	16	39	26	13	22	78	6	16	39	39
C (M%)	0	10	17	36	20	17	27	73	10	17	36	37
C (F%)	3	0	16	43	28	8	19	79	3	16	43	36
C (T%)	2	5	17	41	24	12	24	77	7	17	41	36

Background

Students were encouraged to use the dictionary sparingly as the idea behind this activity was fluency rather than accuracy though a certain amount of accuracy was necessary if meaningful communication was going to take place. They were told to use them when they felt the need but not to rely on them too much. They were encouraged to write down new words and to make a list of them.

Results

The combined female CAR score was slightly higher (79 per cent) than the combined male score (73 per cent). Only one sub-group had a CSAR score which was higher than the MAR score and that was the male sub-group in class B (MAR=31 per cent and the CSAR=44 per cent). The MAR score for the combined classes was 41 per cent and this shows that although agreement was high with the item statement, many of those did not feel strongly about it. The highest MAR score by any sub-group were the females in class B with 47 per cent.

Analysis

Most respondents thought that they had gained new vocabulary through this eight-week course. The degree to which they agreed varied. Some students made notes of new words that came up in their discussions while others took few notes and some none at all. There is no doubt that there was a lot of new vocabulary every class. Far more female students had dictionaries than male students and this may reflect the way each approaches language learning.

Implications

Perhaps next time the instructor could demand that students bring a dictionary to class but at the same time laying down the rules to strictly regulate their use. Students could also be asked to keep a detailed list of new vocabulary that they encounter week by week. A periodic check could also be made from time to time to see how much the new vocabulary is being used in their journal entries.

Conclusion

Overall, respondents in both classes showed agreement with the eight item statements either somewhat or overwhelmingly. Two items received an agreement rating in the 60 per cent range. The item that received the least agreement was the one that asked about whether they thought their speaking ability had improved. This item had

a 63 per cent agreement rating. The item that scored slightly higher was on whether they spoke English most of the time in their group discussions. This received an agreement rating of 65 per cent. Three items received an agreement rating in the 70 per cent range. The lowest rated one in this category was on whether they thought their listening ability had improved. This item had a 74 per cent agreement rating. The next item had an agreement rating of 76 per cent and it asked respondents if they listened to whole class presentations closely. The third one in this group had an agreement rating of 77 per cent and asked respondents if they learned new vocabulary. Three items scored an agreement rating in the 80 per cent range. The first item with an 82 per cent agreement rating was on whether respondents thought they got a lot of practice speaking English. The second highest rating was respondents thinking that their group members spoke English most of the time with 83 per cent showing agreement. The highest rating of 89 per cent was respondents getting English listening practice.

Though there were variations between sub-groups within both classes, there was no discernible difference between the genders as a whole. Differences between gender appeared in each class, but in the case of class A, the females showed stronger agreement where in class B it was the males who showed the stronger agreement. One result that was interesting was the difference between the improvement in listening and the improvement in speaking. Even though this project was aimed at improving fluency, the respondents felt that their listening ability improved more.

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Male/Female

Rating

1=Disagree strongly

2=Disagree

3=Disagree somewhat

4=Agree somewhat

5=Agree

6=Agree strongly

- | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I had a lot of chances to practice speaking English | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. My speaking ability improved..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3. I spoke English most of the time | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4. My group members spoke English most of the time..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 5. I got practice listening to English in my group | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 6. My listening ability improved | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7. I listened to the class presenters fully..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. I learned new vocabulary in my group discussions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |