

## An attempt to teach presentation online using student-centered activities

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### Abstract

The move to online teaching in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the use of technology-enhanced learning in education contexts. Adapting existing courses to be taught online while keeping the interactive elements in a face-to-face course creates challenges for curriculum designers as they attempt to provide peer-to-peer interaction and reflective learning opportunities. Students from different educational disciplines at Chiba University participated in an online course taught in two parts using synchronous lessons via Zoom in a graduate-level English presentation course. The class consisted of three students with different fields of study and different levels of English proficiency. The report combines student responses to online tools for technology-enhanced language learning and teacher reflections on the process of adapting courses. Results tentatively suggest positive effects of integrating principles from learner-centered approaches. Student feedback and teachers' observations suggest that online classes can successfully provide interactive learning experiences. Additionally, the paper includes further development of activities for interactive learning in online presentation classes that may be applied to future courses. Since the tools used in this study enable learner-centered approaches, we believe that they can be applied to many classes regardless of whether they are face-to-face or online.

### 要旨

2020年度、新型コロナウイルス感染症対策のため、千葉大学で開講している授業はすべてオンライン授業への切り替えを余儀なくされた。本学では大学院横断型の授業科目として大学院共通教育科目群が提供されているが、本稿はそのひとつである「アカデミック・プレゼンテーション」という科目の授業実践報告である。受講生は、専攻分野も英語の習熟レベルも異なる3名の学生であった。授業の目的は、学会発表における質疑応答も含めたプレゼンテーションの技術を向上させることであったため、同期型の個別会話レッスンの機会を提供することに加え、学習者中心のアプローチの原則にもとづき、テクノロジーを駆使してインタラクティブな活動を積極的に採り入れた。その結果、学習者からのフィードバック及び教師による観察から、オンラインでの授業実践は前年度の対面授業とほぼ遜色なく高い効果をもたらしたと結論づけた。

*Keywords:*

Learner-centered activities, online learning, technology-enhanced language learning, reflective learning, English presentations

## **1. Introduction**

In the 2020–2021 academic year, Chiba University was forced by the COVID-19 pandemic to evolve our teaching methods in a manner that we have never experienced before. While we had taken the default teaching method of face-to-face classes for granted in the past, in 2020, all classes had to be conducted online. Graduate courses involving academic presentations were no exception. Under such circumstances, we comprehensively reconsidered the format of classes. In recent years there has been an increased focus on active learning as part of a general trend looking at what engages learners in contemporary classrooms (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). The focus on learners and what they are doing rather than looking only at teachers or materials is in part a response to the traditionally teacher-centred approaches used in many contexts. In keeping with the recent trend to look more closely at learning from the student's perspective, this report looks at learner-centered activities, and active participation and involvement in academic tasks as part of an academic presentation course. We took the approach of using learner-centeredness to adapt activities in an existing course for online delivery. The purpose of this report is to review one online course that we conducted in the 2020 academic year and examine the merits of the approach and the potential areas of improvement to offer online academic presentation-based courses of even higher quality in the future. Since the course was taught online, technology tools for delivery of the course are considered, with the benefits and limitations of each tool. Student-centred learning may already be a highly familiar concept, which makes it a suitable theoretical approach. Many teachers already use student-centred approaches as they are familiar with the contrast between student-centred and teacher-centred. Student-centered approaches are relevant particularly at the current time because of concerns about teaching programs related to the ongoing pandemic situation. This report discusses the creation and use of a particular set of organizational approaches listed as student-centered and related to cooperative learning (Jacobs, Renandya & Power, 2016; Jacobs & Renandya, 2019). The researchers use and online tools in the presentation class. We also discuss the relative usefulness of each tool for successful course completion.

Online learning (OL) has been part of the education landscape for some time (Huang, 2000; Mynard & Murphy, 2012; Sharma & Westbrook, 2016), and the use of

technology in education is not new in the third decade of the 21st century. The effects of OL during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic are far from clear. Adapting learning activities for OL can create opportunities and challenges for teachers and students. However, the current situation of teaching online in a pandemic is different from previous reasons for moving to online teaching. The delivery of an OL course using entirely synchronous means is what has been called “in effect, face-to-face learning at a distance” (Sharma & Westbrook, 2016: 534) because live lessons may be organized in essentially the same way as an in-person class. Teachers may use similar resources, lesson structure, and content delivery. To some degree, the synchronous online lesson attempts to replicate the activities in a face-to-face course, although there are some differences. From the perspective of planning learning activities, the online classroom may be seen as a continuation of the physical learning environment of a classroom. Since this presentation course was conducted using synchronous live lessons, the lessons were structured in a similar way to those in a typical lesson.

On the other hand, synchronous online teaching requires interactive live lessons to suits learners’ needs. Advantages to this kind of class are logistical (students do not need to travel to class), but disadvantages include connection issues and the learning curve in using online tools (ibid., 541). At this stage, we should introduce blended learning (BL) as a related concept. BL started in business and has been used in corporate training for many years and is understood in education to mean, (1) a combination of face-to-face and online teaching, (2) a combination of technologies, or (3) a combination of methodologies (Sharma, 2010: 56). The first of the three is generally used in contexts where a blended approach “substitutes online learning for a portion of the traditional face-to-face instructional time” (Owston, York & Murtha, 2013: 38). Earlier uses of BL have suggested that learners can gain a variety of benefits from both in-person and online approaches (Barrett & Sharma, 2007; Felix, 2003; Dudeney & Hockley, 2007). Factors affecting teachers’ success and engagement with both OL and BL include access to online tools and the teachers’ background and experience with technology (Guo & Lui, 2013). Additionally, future courses may look at ways to allow for technology as part of a traditional course. The current discussion also considers the role of technology in education using the Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition (SAMR) model. The SAMR model (Puentedura, 2013) is a way of seeing the uses of technology in language learning contexts. From the first stage of S=substitution, technology is simply substituted for classroom-based activities. At the next level, A=Augmentation, technology improves the course and the activities. Puentedura (2014) describes these first two stages as being enhancement or improved

learning. M= Modification is the next stage up in complexity at the higher levels, where activities and course assessments are redesigned and changed significantly. At the highest level of change, R=Redefinition, technology means that new activities and tasks can be created, which would not have been possible without the technology itself.

Over the past year, both faculty members and students have become more experienced in handling online classes, while the technical infrastructure for conducting these classes has also improved. As institutions navigated the sudden shift to OL in 2020, teaching synchronously using Zoom was a shared experience in Japan and overseas (see Cheung, 2021 for an example from Hong Kong). Synchronous online teaching presents peer-to-peer interaction and technology-enhanced learning opportunities for presentation classes preparing graduate students for professional research careers. It is thus possible that OL or BL may continue beyond the current online teaching situation. The focus of this paper is to shed light on the potential success of online programs during the challenge of moving to learn online. Because of this, we have decided to identify the merits of conducting presentation-based classes online, as well as some areas of improvement that warrant attention.

## **2. Method and approach**

### **2.1 Instructors**

This academic presentation-based course was planned by two instructors who collaborated on creating the course and planning the activities. The roles of the two instructors reflected their respective connections with the host institution. The main instructor was a British instructor with tertiary teaching experience who conducted 16 teaching sessions for four days. Each session was one lesson from an in-person version of the same course taught by the same teacher in the previous academic year. The British instructor has worked in Japan for over ten years and has experience presenting at international and domestic academic conferences. The other course planner was a Japanese instructor who organized online individual presentation sessions with Filipino language instructors before the intensive sessions and conducted surveys for the students before and after the intensive lectures. In addition, the Japanese instructor provided additional support about the background and learning experiences of the learners, thus assisting with the planning of the course and administration of the course. As the move to online teaching for the academic year of 2020 occurred quite suddenly, the two instructors kept in regular contact about the planning of the course.

## 2.2 Course details

This course is one of the Common Graduate Courses and was newly established in the 2019 academic year as a course that is open to any graduate student at Chiba University or any fourth-year undergraduate student who has decided to enter a graduate school at Chiba University. The presentation course was conducted into two parts. The first half of the course comprised six individual online lessons conducted via Zoom by an online Filipino language teacher. There are only a limited number of papers on the results of short-term speaking instruction without studying abroad. However, there are some examples of highly effective teaching by instructors who belong to the Outer Circle as proposed by Kachru (1982). The Outer Circle (e.g., India and the Philippines) is distinguished from the Inner Circle (e.g., the United States and the United Kingdom), and the Expanding Circle (e.g., Japan and China). In the Philippines, one of the Outer Circle countries, although the native languages are Tagalog and Cebuano, English is positioned as their official language, and the pronunciation used in English is close to American English, making it easy for Japanese to understand. In addition, there is a strong motivation to learn English because a high level of English proficiency is required to obtain a job that guarantees a certain level of salary in the Philippines (Sugimoto & Yamamoto, 2019). Moreover, because of the rigorous screening and training required to become a teacher at a language school in the Philippines, Japanese learners who take individual lessons rarely complain or question the English skills of their teachers because they are Filipinos (Takino, 2018). Since the participants in this course did not have the opportunity to use English regularly and were not very good at speaking English instantly, we decided to have them take one-on-one conversation lessons with a Filipino instructor before they took the intensive presentation course in the second half. With more than 1,300 instructors registered with the online English school, each student chose an instructor of their choice to take lessons at a time of their availability. We encouraged the students to take the lessons seriously by telling them in advance that they would be asked to give a presentation on a topic of their choice immediately after the six lessons (26th February).

In contrast, the second half consisted of intensive sessions given by the main instructor, also taught using the medium of Zoom. Students were required to deliver presentations two times in the course, once at the end of the first half and once more in the second half (26th February and 19th March). The intensive sessions included a break from 5th March to 19th March, considering planning time for the final presentation. Course planning had to be done with consideration for the available dates of the students and instructor and the academic planning calendar.

The course goals were focused on understanding presentation structure and building confidence in delivering a presentation. Recognizing that most graduate students have some experience with academic presentations already, the course did not begin with absolute basics and assumed a degree of familiarity with presentation principles. The materials for the course included a presentation textbook as a reference text (Wallwork, 2016). As the presentation course was open to students from any discipline, the content had to apply to any discipline. Although there was no L2 proficiency level for entry to the course, several descriptors from the 2018 Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) were used to connect the learning activities with the course goals. These were related to the B2 level of overall spoken production when using a sustained monologue, i.e. “Can give clear, systematically developed descriptions and presentations, with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail” and “Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on a wide range of subjects related to his/her field of interest, expanding and supporting ideas with subsidiary points and relevant examples” (Council of Europe, 2018: 69). Additionally, concerning the spontaneous use of the target language at the higher end of the B2 level, the descriptor addressing audiences is relevant, i.e. “Can give a clear, systematically developed presentation, with highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail” and “Can depart spontaneously from a prepared text and follow up interesting points raised by members of the audience, often showing remarkable fluency and ease of expression” (74). The ability to respond spontaneously is particularly relevant to using the target language in a conference or presentation situation when the audience is likely to be made up of knowledgeable peers. With consideration of the CEFR descriptors, the course suggested three goals, that by the end of the intensive sessions, i.e., the learners should:

- (1) recognize the basic patterns of an effective presentation,
- (2) ask and answer questions concerning a research presentation, and
- (3) create and deliver a research presentation using the basic patterns of an effective presentation.

**Table 1** *Online presentation course schedule*

Date	Course contents
January 28	Course introduction
January 28–February 25	Online individual lessons (six 25-minute sessions)
February 26	Online presentation session 1, Questionnaire survey 1
March 3, 4, 5, 19	Intensive sessions (fourteen 90-minute sessions, two preparation sessions)
March 19	Online presentation session 2, Questionnaire survey 2

The intensive sessions covered content created for the in-person version of the course taught in the 2019-2020 academic year. Moving to the online format meant adapting several activities and removing homework from most of the course. A mid-term presentation had to be adapted with more of an emphasis on planning a talk in a short time instead of practicing a prepared talk. In this way, it should be noted that the intensive course already differed from a typical once-a-week course.

The structure of the online presentation class (Table 2) was based on the earlier in-person version of the same course from the 2019 academic year. Organizing the content for the online version of the course led to the creation of more learner-centred content due to the mixed-level classes and the different academic disciplines of the learners. Activities should focus on developing higher-order thinking skills such as evaluation and analysis. These skills are described in Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001). The bottom three levels of the taxonomy (remember, understand, apply) represent lower-order thinking skills (LOTS), and the top three levels (analyze, evaluate, create) are referred to as higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). Analyzing includes examining ideas and organizing content, while questioning includes thinking of responses to questions as well as predicting questions and formulating suitable responses. For example, in a theoretical discussion of various kinds of academic

**Table 2** *Lessons for intensive online sessions*

Date	Session	Course contents
March 3	1	Course introduction
	2	Basic patterns of an academic presentation
	3	Effectively opening and concluding talks
	4	Structuring a talk and building transitions between sections
March 4	5	Developing main points using visual aids
	6	Using evidence and data in presentations
	7	Academic language in academic presentations. Strategies for using a written script vs. notes
	8	Critique of an academic presentation and reflection (reflection paper)
March 5	9	Reviewing the main patterns of a research presentation
	10	Planning and explaining data points using slides effectively
	11	Formulating and responding to a presentation using questions
	12	Rhetorical strategies, stance, and gesture
March 19	13	Final presentations preparation
	14	Final presentations preparation and reflection paper
	15	Final presentations and feedback
	16	Final presentations and course review

literature classroom activities could include comparing own ideas with the ideas of others. Evaluating can mean defending a position and critiquing a particular stance. Both of these are key ideas in creating academic presentations necessary for successful research.

### 2.3 Course Delivery

The presentation course was taught synchronously using an OL format. Both parts of the presentation course (individual lessons and the intensive sessions) were taught synchronously using the medium of Zoom (<https://zoom.us/education>). Zoom is a web conferencing application which many teachers adopted in the 2020 academic year. Zoom has interactive elements such as chat functions and the possibility for online group work using breakout rooms. Preparation lessons from specialist language teachers preceded the online course and also used the medium of Zoom. While other software, such as Google Meet can be used for online teaching, Zoom has become a preferred tool for teaching online lessons in many teaching contexts. As with many other educational institutions, we decided to use the educational account issued by the university.

### 2.4 Participants

The academic presentation-based course was open to all graduate students enrolled at the university and fourth-year undergraduates who intend to go on to graduate school. While this course attracted around ten students (including graduate and fourth-year undergraduates) when it was offered in past years, only three students enrolled in the course in the 2020-2021 academic year. All three students completed the course successfully, attending every live lesson during the intensive sessions and participating in all activities. The instructors explained the details of this study to all three participants and obtained their consent for the results to be published. The three learners were:

#### *Student A*

A Japanese graduate student at the Graduate School of Medicine who is aiming to acquire the necessary English proficiency for research and reported low confidence using English and low English proficiency. His estimated CEFR speaking level was B1 (intermediate).

#### *Student B*

A Taiwanese graduate student at the Graduate School of Medicine who is aiming to acquire the necessary English proficiency for research and reported a generally



positive approach to English. Her estimated CEFR speaking level was B1-B2 (approaching upper-intermediate). This student was also proficient in using Japanese as a foreign language. This student had recently presented her research in Japanese at a research conference and had a clear goal of sharing her research findings in English.

#### *Student C*

A Japanese fourth-year undergraduate student majoring in mathematics who is aiming to find work abroad in the future and reported a generally positive approach to English. His estimated CEFR speaking level was B1-B2 (approaching upper-intermediate).

As the classes for this course were conducted online, there were three possible reasons for its small enrollment even though students could enroll in it even with the COVID-19 restrictions on physical movement in place. (1) Students were required to attend the full class schedule (Six online individual lessons in February aside from four days of intensive lectures in March) to enroll in this course, (2) As the classes of this course were held in February and March, the grades would be issued the following year. This meant that students graduating in March 2021 were unable to enroll in the course, and (3) Raising awareness of this course was a challenge as students were not allowed to enter the university campus during the 2020 academic year.

While the small number of students enrolled appears to be a limitation in discussing the use of online interactive tools for this presentation class, there are some advantages to working with a small number of enrolments. These include the possibility for detailed feedback for each learner and the potential for more student-to-student interaction. In the next section, we consider the course details, the OL tools in the course, and selected feedback from learners, which helps guide planning for future courses.

## **2.5 Principles in course design**

When adapting an existing course, curriculum planners should consider elements such as course goals, content and sequencing, monitoring of progress, and assessment (Nation & Macalister, 2010: 167). A course should weigh up the learners' estimated second language (L2) proficiency, recognizing the learning backgrounds, age, and experience. Curriculum planners should also consider whether the learners have international study experiences or are international students themselves. If the learners are from different disciplines, the course planners should consider what kind of content the learners expect and provide relevant content to meet the needs of the learners.

A needs assessment can be conducted in a typical face-to-face course by gaining classroom feedback and observation during lesson time. However, there may be some need to adapt existing materials in an online course, considering additional factors such as interaction and learner engagement. Learner engagement is currently receiving more attention in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), in particular the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of learning (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Looking at what learners are doing in language classrooms and focusing on the actions and interactions of learners is part of a move towards greater learner-centeredness. A helpful framework for designing online materials for the presentation course can be created from the Student Centred Learning (SCL) and Student Centred Cooperative Learning (SCCL) approach (Jacobs, Renandya & Power, 2016; Jacobs & Renandya, 2019). SCL is “learning in which students, individually and with peers, have a key role in designing, conducting, and evaluating their own learning” (Jacobs & Renandya, 2019: 3). Along with Cooperative Learning (CL), SCL uses a number of principles which develop learner empowerment, for example encouraging learner autonomy and critical thinking skills. The elements of this approach have been selected with in-person learning in mind, but they can be applied to OL. Although the concept of student-centred learning may already be well known, its application in specific learning contexts is of continued interest. The exact uses of student-centred approaches may vary according to various environmental factors, and in part because they represent a “range of continua, rather than a set of either/or choices” (Jacobs & Renandya, 2019: 3). There are ten principles for SCL, emphasizing students as co-creators of their own learning through interactive course activities and opportunities to ask questions to guide learning. Learner autonomy, focus on thinking skills, and self-assessment or peer-assessment are all used in courses with SCL principles. One of the main ideas about SCL is that it contrasts with traditional, teacher-fronted learning, which was aligned with the principle of this course to focus on the learners themselves. The approaches used in SCL is part of a wider paradigm shift away from teacher-centred learning, which is echoed in other elements of educational organisation and planning. Students as co-learners, teachers learning alongside students, and other principles of the SCL approach, are all part of a wider societal arc in which less power is centrally retained and that participatory knowledge building becomes a more familiar part of the learning landscape (Jacobs & Renandya, 2019: 7).

In practice, SCL means that students can and should contribute in class, engage in peer-to-peer learning, and interact more. Instead of the teacher being the source of all questions, students create and guide the learning progress by creating questions and

topics for discussion. SCL is ideally suited to classes with students from different disciplines. The students themselves are working at the graduate level and are, relatively speaking, highly knowledgeable about their area of chosen interest. Working with students who have already learned about their subject area in detail allows for a depth of discussion. Integrating the students' fields of interest into the sessions proves beneficial for the student-researchers, as they become aware of their subject knowledge and the curiosity of their peers to learn more. For these reasons, creating opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, including questions and answers, can be mutually beneficial for speakers and their audience. The principles of SCL (as summarized in Table 3) were used to guide the planning of activities in the presentation course.

While many of these elements may also be part of lesson planning in typically face-to-face courses, several of these principles are particularly relevant in the current situation. Implementing online language classes provides an opportunity and a challenge

**Table 3 Ten elements of Student Centred Learning (Adapted from Jacobs & Renandya, 2019: 4)**

Elements of Student Centred Learning	Brief Explanation
1. Students and Teachers as Co-learners	Teachers are not the only source of knowledge. Students and teachers learn along with each other.
2. Student-student Interaction	Students believe they can learn from peers and develop the skills for learning together.
3. Learner Autonomy	Students learn to be autonomous lifelong learners. Autonomy means the students are in control of their own learning.
4. Focus on Meaning	Students understand what they are learning and why they are learning it.
5. Curricular Integration	Individual classes aim to link with other learning (within the course of study and their lives beyond the classroom).
6. Diversity	Teachers and students plan the learning with the needs of all learners in mind.
7. Thinking Skills	Students and teachers apply, elaborate on, expand on, modify, analyze and synthesize while learning.
8. Alternative Assessment	Assessment is expanded beyond short answers and includes self-assessment and peer assessment.
9. Learning Climate	Students cooperate and support each other's learning.
10. Motivation	Rather than extrinsic motivation dominating, the class strives to promote intrinsic motivation, where everyone is a motivator of their individual self, their peers and their teachers.

for course designers (Pu, 2020). Including peer-to-peer interaction and other adapted course materials can help to enhance learning in a variety of ways. As discussed in the next section, focusing on learners can support effective learning while adapting to the new online situation.

### **3. Examples of teaching materials**

Next, we consider how the course was adapted to make the lessons and activities more suited to the OL environment. For example, a presentation class usually contains interaction and feedback from teacher-student and student-student. Several online tools were used to balance activities to interest and engage the students, including multimodal mini-lectures, Google tools for learning, and an interactive classroom page using Padlet (<https://padlet.com/>). To achieve an OL experience suitable for the mixed English proficiency of the students, we selected interactive tools for learning.

As teachers have become more accustomed to using various teaching tools in the new online teaching environment, so have students become more able to integrate technology into their study. Throughout moving entirely online in 2020, students and teachers have had to adapt to the new teaching style. Although the time has been relatively short to learn new skills to suit the new online environment, adding new tools seems to have become more accessible than before. Students appear to be accustomed to using online collaborative documents and sending in work using learning management systems. Creating activities that encourage SCL is aligned well with the use of integrated online tools. The following section describes the principles for the creation of activities in the online presentation course.

#### **3.1 Multimodal teaching resources**

In order to model efficient use of time and visual aids in presenting, various types of multimodal materials can support learning. For example, short presentations can introduce new ideas in mini-lectures instead of asking students to read a textbook chapter. While textbooks sometimes include links to videos, these are sometimes limited to TED talks (<https://www.ted.com/>). TED talks are often very good examples of professional-level presentations. However, the talks themselves and the contents of the talks can seem unrealistic content for the type of presentation that student-researchers will conduct at academic conferences or workplaces. TED-style presentations may rely on a narrative structure or deviate somewhat from the presentation style given in an academic setting. One additional issue for TED talks is that the academic speakers are

often senior or more experienced in their fields of expertise. TED talks themselves may contain exciting content, but the speakers are not peers, and the distance between the level of student-researchers may be off-putting. Instead, it may be helpful and motivating to use examples of presentations from real students. For these reasons, varying the examples from more professional TED talks and online resources from graduate students may be preferable.

A solution to this problem was creating multimodal slides with PowerPoint or Google Slides. Learners are familiar with PowerPoint and have used it in their presentations. The aim was to demonstrate how multimodal resources can increase opportunities for engagement with topics in a more dynamic way than simply reading a chapter. For example, using a textbook chapter as background reading, a multimodal presentation (Figure 1) helps summarize and present information in a manageable way. In addition, the use of short talks instead of longer lectures helped to model the pace of a presentation in a way that was understandable and clear to students.

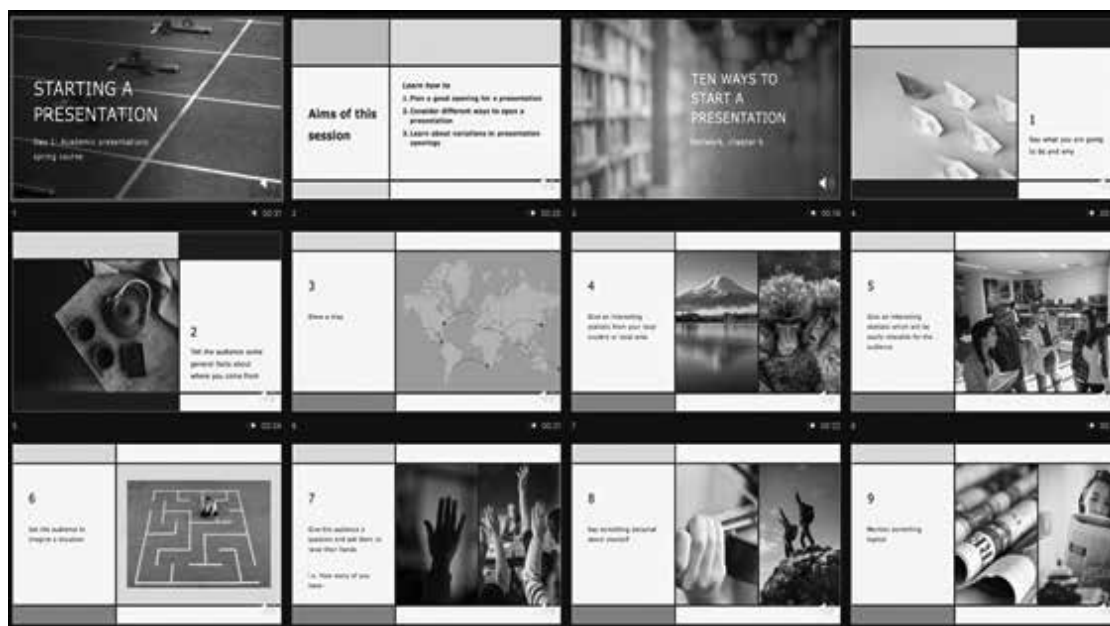


Figure 1 Slides for interactive presentation of course materials (starting a presentation)

### 3.2 Google Classroom and Google tools

Google Classroom is becoming a widely used learning management system for teachers using integrated Google accounts for education. From the teacher's perspective, the intuitive design is easy to use. Students can see deadlines and tasks appearing on a timeline to help task management. Google has multilingual support for all of the applications available. Recently renamed Google Workspace includes the

applications Slides, Sheets, Docs, Forms, and Jamboard. While Forms and Docs may already be familiar to many teachers, Jamboard (<https://edu.google.com/products/jamboard/>) is a relatively recent addition and is particularly useful for creating learner-centered activities.

One of the recent innovations from the Google Workspace is the interactive whiteboard Jamboard. The name, Jamboard, suggests a playful 'jam' as in musical improvisation. Jamboard is an interactive whiteboard that can be used for making notes or organizing ideas. As well as using Jamboard in the initial stages of presentation planning, users can add images to whiteboard pages and use markers, sticky notes, and highlighters for annotation of slides. Jamboard is an innovation that has been made possible through the move to online lessons. In the online presentation class, Jamboard was used for collaborative comment and critique and planning and sharing ideas related to giving academic presentations. Student B, the international student, already had experience presenting her research in Japanese at an online conference and showed clear self-awareness in recognizing the differences between online classes and face-to-face learning:

*I think there are pros and cons to using zoom for class. However, in today's class, I didn't feel any obstacles while communicating. The resources (TED, Jamboard...) we are using in the class are really useful for me, and let me think of even if it is in online teaching there are still lots of fun things that we can access to learn about English! (Student B)*

Jamboard is a tool that may be useful in a variety of settings, including live online lessons. The tool may be particularly suited to learner-centered activities since it focuses on the higher-order aspects of Bloom's taxonomy while allowing for peer-to-peer feedback and interaction.

In Figure 2, we can see a Jamboard whiteboard created by Student A, whose overall interest in English and motivation seemed to develop positively throughout the course. For example, he created notes in session three on the topic of structuring a talk. The colours differentiate between the sections of the presentation, while the sticky notes' size helps visualize the detail in each section. The activity was a free task which students completed using their own topics and ideas. The instruction was to decide how much time should be given to different parts of a presentation, given 20 minutes as the total amount of time. When the students had prepared their ideas, they compared Jamboard slides and discussed them. Another student may have allocated a different

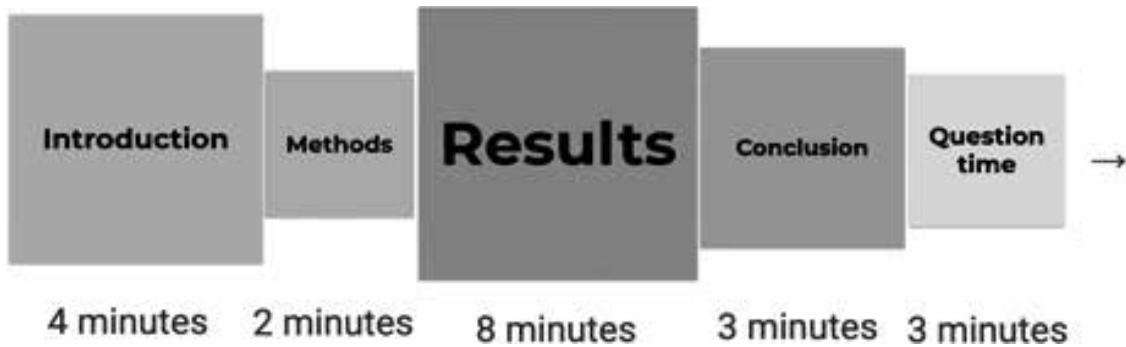


Figure 2 *Jamboard* notes from student A showing the structure of an academic presentation

number of minutes for each section, for example allowing less time for the conclusion or separating out results and discussion.

After making notes about each presentation, students explained their planning with justification for the choice of timings. While whiteboards are usually used in classrooms in a variety of ways and are highly familiar to teachers, interactive whiteboards may be less well known. Using an interactive whiteboard as a part of the planning process for a piece of academic work is likely to be a new innovation for many teachers and learners. However, visualizing is not a new concept and teachers will already be aware of the potential uses of such tools. Visualizing and planning a presentation before delivering the talk may help to demystify the presentation process. Thinking about the ideas and content and explaining it to others is a kind of metacognition (Flavell, 1979) and may be considered a way of expanding current knowledge. Learners can also contribute to the pages on the Jamboard simultaneously while completing online group work, and the teacher can also offer online feedback. While Jamboard and other tools for group work and interactive learning may be new to students, their growing familiarity with online teaching tools such as Jamboard can facilitate positive interactions and support target language use.

### 3.3 Peer-to-peer online resources

The integration of real-world materials was used to encourage the development of thinking skills and peer-to-peer learning. While textbooks and other materials for language learning can be used effectively in many situations, resources from contexts beyond the classroom may also be appealing.

“Three Minute Thesis (3MT)” (<https://threeminutethesis.uq.edu.au/>) is an international competition originating at the University of Queensland in Australia. The competition is one in which graduates of any discipline summarize their thesis into a short presentation

with only one slide as a visual aid. The 3MT is now used at over 85 universities around the world. As a teaching resource, in the presentation class, the students watched one of the talks and discussed the successful delivery of the presentation. The talk was given by Luo Yifei from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore in 2020 and was a winning presentation from the 3MT competition in the Asia region (<https://vimeo.com/showcase/7624763/video/464055881>). The student-researcher is a non-native speaker of English, and her topic was very carefully summarized in her short talk.

The procedure in class was as follows. Before the lesson, the script of the talk was prepared by the instructor and provided to students as a digital document. Next, during the lesson, the instructor explained the 3MT briefly and suggested that the class would watch and discuss the positive points and areas for improvement using a successful talk. An interactive whiteboard with guiding questions was provided for discussion time, using the following prompts:

1. What did you like about this presentation?
2. What could you use from this presentation in your own presentation style?
3. How can this presentation be improved?
4. Is there anything in this presentation you would not do?

Discussing a successful presentation can help learners to understand their own position and stance in terms of research. From the perspective of encouraging the use of the target language, evaluating and analyzing existing presentations can help to support the creation of own ideas in original work. Appraising others, making a judgment about a presentation, or in this case looking for ways to improve a talk, all helped to lead towards the eventual course goal of creating an original presentation. The results of the discussion using the successful 3MT talk meant that learners could see the elements of a successful talk and relate them to their own aspirations and goals.

### **3.4 Padlet**

An additional online tool in this course was the online notice board tool Padlet (<https://padlet.com/>). Padlet is versatile and is free for a basic account and can be used instead of a class webpage as a space for sharing course information and links. The page can be allocated a password, and then the page can be used to share links and documents, as it was primarily used in this presentation class. Padlet is simple to use and can be adapted for group activities, where students can contribute to a group page, for planning, or for peer-to-peer feedback. Padlet can be integrated with other



tools such as websites and links to course documents. Google Documents, Forms, and other links can all be added to the Padlet during the lesson or later. In this way, course material is easily accessible. While Padlet is an attractive option for basic use, its main limitation is that for the premium service this is a paid tool, so it is not part of an integrated Google Workplace. Teachers require an academic account to be able to use it across courses or to make full use of the versatility it offers.

Padlet can be used in real-world situations also. At online conferences, particularly since 2020, Padlet seems to be popularly used as a message board for conference participants. Padlet does appear to be most effectively used as a kind of interactive noticeboard, suitable for meetings and temporary collation of links and information. Teachers may find Padlet useful for online activities which require all participants to contribute ideas. Using tools such as Padlet can support in-class learning and SCL, while also providing an opportunity to mirror communication beyond the classroom. As we can see from Figure 3, the tool is suitable for integrating Google links and course materials. Content can be added easily during lesson time or immediately after an individual session. In the next section, we look at how students responded to the course overall and discuss some areas of future course development.



Figure 3 Padlet page on day three of the presentation class

#### 4. Results and discussion

In this section, we consider the feedback from students with the aim of learning more about how the lessons and the course were received. There were two methods of gathering feedback. The first was from survey questions taken from students when they had finished their individual online lessons. Due to the small number of students, the results are mentioned briefly, and the summary of results is discussed below. The second part of this section refers to comments students wrote in their reflective assignments during the intensive course. These reflective comments were gathered using Google Forms immediately after the lessons or activities were conducted and they were part of the grade for the class. Students were aware that their participation in the classroom activities would be graded. The comments from the reflective writing offer a snapshot of learner opinions which we discuss below with reference to the principles of course design. There are limits to how learner reflections may be considered evidence for or against any particular element of course design, but given the exploratory nature of this investigation, we offer the reflective comments as tentative support for the approaches taken the course.

Two surveys were conducted to gain insights from the students during their participation in different stages of the course. The first was conducted at the end of February when students had completed their online lessons with the language teacher (as discussed in section 2.1) and the second was conducted in March after the live intensive lessons (see Table 1). The questions were the same in both surveys. In addition to a free-response section, students were also asked to answer the following questions on a 5-point scale: “Do you now enjoy communicating in English?” “Do you now engage in conversations in English more proactively?” “Are you now able to speak using grammatically correct English?” The purpose of these surveys was to allow us to directly obtain feedback from the enrolled students and incorporate it into future classes in order for us to provide education of a higher quality. Although the small number of students means that the number of comments and results are limited, the results of the surveys offer some insights into areas for further development in future presentation courses.

Comparing the survey results obtained before and after the individual lessons, as well as those obtained after the intensive lectures, all three students strongly agreed that they “now enjoy communicating in English” and “engage in conversations in English more proactively.” However, all three students disagreed that they are “now able to speak using grammatically correct English.” While this suggests that the students can

now speak English proactively without the fear of making mistakes, which is commendable in itself, a different approach is required to improve their ability to speak English without making mistakes. Student A reported a shift in thinking about using English with a practical purpose (communication). Student A initially seemed to have low confidence using English, however after the sessions wrote, “What we discussed is very useful for me. I want to practice what I learned today”. Student A had uneven skills in English and benefitted from the time spent planning activities. His enthusiasm for sharing his research with others helped create a space for growth in English learning during the course.

As well as gathering feedback from students in the two surveys, Google Forms were used to collect reflective comments throughout the course. Students gave permission for their comments to be used for research and course planning purposes. As the intensive section of the course was over four days, these reflective comments were gathered as part of the activities in the lessons and immediately afterwards. What follows is a selection of the responses, from students A, B and C. These comments were given in answer to the prompt: *What did you think about the activities? What will you try to improve next time?*

*It was a very fun and effective time. I would like to improve my presentation...After tomorrow, I will try to get answers from the audience. (Student A)*

*I really appreciate the opportunity to let us rethink our personal experience! For me, I gave a presentation about why I chose my research. While I was thinking of the reason it made me organize my mechanism logistically. Additionally, it increased my passion for my study and reminded me of how I make an effort to do this research. If I have the chance to do this topic again, I would take two actions to improve it. First, having some interactions with the audience. Second, bring more impressive endings for the presentation. (Student B)*

*I learned a lot of things and enjoyed the conversation. I gained fundamental knowledge of presentations such as common phrases. In addition, I got useful websites and YouTube programs. I'm going to use them as a reference. Moreover, I paid attention to give a good question. I thought I could effectively use some phrases to construct presentations and good statistics. Next time, I'm going to try out other phrases on the website. (Student C)*

On the second day of intensive sessions, students again wrote reflective comments about their progress. Student B was particularly interested in the example presentation we analyzed from the 2020 winner of the international competition “Three Minute Thesis (3MT).” The winning presentation was a non-native English speaker whose thesis was summarized effectively into three minutes with the use of one slide. From these various comments, we can infer that making learner-centered activities is valuable and worthwhile.

*Giving a good question must also be a skill to learn, so I will focus on others' presentations. In terms of my English, it is sometimes a hindrance to understanding what to do... I had quality time with her and other participants, so time went much faster than I expected. (Student A)*

*There are three parts that I really enjoyed today's class. First, the part about watching the presentation of the champion from Singapore. From that presentation, I think our facial expressions and gesture are essential and how the audience gets our information accurately is also important. Second, the vocabulary website helps us to count how many academic words are used in the paper and what are words that we can use in the paper. The third part is that we can have a chance to present with visual aids. (Student B)*

*Time went faster than yesterday. It meant I could focus on the class. I learned dozens of academic phrases, and how to check if it is suitable for presentations or not. We discussed the difference between scripts and notes. I think it is natural to start with making a presentation with a script, but I'm going to make a presentation with notes. With notes, I can have room to change what I say according to the atmosphere as well as being able to naturally speak. (Student C)*

In this section, we briefly discussed learner responses to the presentation class and activities. Two surveys were conducted at the end of each part of the course (online individual lessons and intensive sessions). The discussion here is brief but feedback from students appears to support our own observations that the classes developed an interest in the course content. We consider survey responses and reflective comments to be a valuable part of gaining insights into the progress of learning and for the planning of future courses.

#### **4.1 Advantages of online classes over face-to-face classes**

There are many benefits to OL, some of which were not fully understood before the pandemic pushed courses online. The first benefit is related to organizing group work. When students engage in group-based discussions in a Zoom lesson, they can use the time available more efficiently without having to waste time changing seats. Learners can also concentrate on the conversation without being affected by background noise, assuming they have a suitable online course location. Even if more students enrolled, it would be possible to quickly split the students into smaller groups using breakout rooms to give each student more opportunities to speak up.

The synchronous Zoom lessons have several limitations, however. The first is related to time. Learners in Zoom lessons have to be prepared for the OL course, but they also have to deal with potential sound problems, connection issues, and other hindrances. It is clear from teaching online in 2020 that live lessons are tiring for students and that focusing on the Zoom screen for lengthy sessions is not a sustainable way of learning. One solution is to use a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning with input using a virtual classroom, followed by homework assignments for a combination of controlled practice and production of the target language. M-learning (mobile learning), which includes cloud-based tools to access learning materials anywhere, is another way to create a more seamless use of technology (see Stockwell, 2016 for an overview). Online courses making balanced use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) for pre-tasks and flipped learning could allow for greater flexibility of learning and give learners with a greater need for scaffolded learning more support. Using multimodal resources such as videos and quizzes, reading, and listening to content can help prepare learners for live sessions in a blended online course.

#### **4.2 Effects of creating opportunities for students to give two rounds of presentations**

The purpose of the first round of presentations was to take a video of the best presentation they could think of before learning about presentations intensively so that they could objectively see how much they had learned over the course. Therefore, if the students felt that they had grown at the end of the second presentation at the end of the course, then the purpose of the first round of presentation was achieved. While the students were able to speak English with little hesitation during the first round of presentations, the content of their presentations was a little lacking as they had not learned how to deliver academic presentations effectively. For example, in planning their talks closely, they thought about how to connect ideas, and through using visual aids to support the message of their talk, the talk became more unified.

Both the students and the instructors agreed that the quality of the second round of presentations delivered after the intensive lectures was better than the first as the students could pick up academic expressions through the lectures, recognize the importance of charts and tables, and learn about presentation techniques systematically. Related to the CEFR descriptors mentioned earlier in this report, students all became more able and willing to give “clear, systematically developed descriptions and presentations” and were able to find success when giving “clear, detailed descriptions and presentations” (Council of Europe, 2018: 69). While students from different disciplines and English learning backgrounds will have various needs, peer-to-peer and reflective SCL activities can take advantage of the students and guide the learning to suit a broad range of levels and abilities.

#### **4.3 Effects of creating opportunities for individual lessons prior to the intensive lectures**

One of the challenges of OL is creating interactive lessons through the online method of lesson delivery. While some students might keep quiet in a large class as they expect their classmates to speak up, all students are required to participate in individual lessons regardless of whether they like it. Students who had few chances to communicate in English often learn to speak English more proactively by making time for these lessons before the intensive lectures. Moreover, taking part in individual lessons allowed them to grasp their own weaknesses in English and form a clearer idea of what they should focus on picking up during the intensive lectures. Especially in the Japanese environment, not many graduate students have the need to speak English, and these three students had scarcely any opportunity to communicate in English in their normal college life. Therefore, it was quite meaningful for them to be provided with lessons in which they had to speak in English. However, there may be room for improvement in the number of lessons and the content of the lessons. As graduate students, they are in a position where it is difficult for them to make time for additional study, but if they have high goals in terms of their English ability, it would be ideal for them to take longer, more intensive private lessons so that they can speak on more specialized topics.

#### **4.4 Potential areas of improvement**

Delivering a presentation online is an entirely different experience from giving one before a large audience. It is not a question of which is more difficult, online or face-to-face presentation. For example, even online, there are problems such as when the listener is easily distracted and one-way presentations lacking interaction with the

audience. There are also tips to make a successful face-to-face presentation. Therefore, if the ultimate goal is to improve online presentation skills, one should practice online, and if the ultimate goal is to improve face-to-face presentation skills, one should practice in face-to-face presentation settings. Therefore, we may need to devise new ways of simulating the atmosphere of being in the presence of a live audience or arrange for a one-off face-to-face session for student presentations. As students noted in this course, interaction and feedback from the teacher and peers seemed to assist them in their immediate use of course content. A reasonable next stage in course planning is to use a combination of online activities and live or interactive learning. The blended approach seems to meet this need. Peer-to-peer learning is highly valuable since graduate students are frequently involved in their own research preparations and could include getting ready to present at academic conferences while taking the presentation course. Building time for students to talk about their research and share their own experiences is one way to help them prepare for the next step of presenting in English.

The second consideration in any online environment is to consider time for homework and preparation. The presentation course discussed in this paper did not have any asynchronous content, which means that all the lesson content was delivered live during the sessions. Due to the lesson scheduling (see Table 1), it was not possible to rely on student preparation or homework between sessions. A blended online course, in which online resources and activities are combined with face-to-face sessions, includes consideration of these points. In the 2021 academic year, we decided to return to the once-a-week scheduling for the course.

The new OL environment could impact successful interaction in other ways, for example, in their options to get support for learning. In addition, students may be concerned about Internet access. Planning and conducting the course allowed for the possibility of connection issues, with some materials being pre-recorded and other activities being available offline. Although the possibility of equipment and network failure will likely decrease moving forward, this risk will never be completely eliminated. Therefore, it is necessary to always prepare for unforeseen circumstances and make contingency plans to ensure that students will not be unfairly shortchanged.

## 5. Conclusions

Due to the evolving nature of the pandemic situation, at the time of writing this report there are still COVID-19 safety measures in place locally, nationally, and internationally. The effects of moving courses online and adapting course materials to

new formats are not yet fully understood. Curriculum designers, instructors and students may benefit from responding in a creative way to the challenges of the current situation. What we have learned so far from this pandemic situation already is certainly useful for our future courses. From the experience planning and reporting on this one class, we can tentatively suggest that various tools for interactive online learning (OL) can be adapted to suit individual learners. In the example of this multi-level presentation class, the course activities had to be adapted for online teaching as well as a small number of students. For courses with larger numbers of students, materials and activities would be suitably adapted for more group work and pair work. In the future, we would like to take on new challenges to achieve the Modification or Redefinition stage of the SAMR model (Puentedura, 2013). However, this is not simply because of the availability of innovative technologies, but because of the possibility of even more effective implementation of second language education. Therefore, in comparison with the weekly face-to-face class conducted in 2019, we were able to obtain the same level of high evaluation from the students. However, it was felt that there were limitations in conducting the entire course online at this time and that it is necessary to explore the possibility of a blended online course in the future. Engaging with online tools for interactive student-centered learning (SCL) presents the opportunity to develop courses and activities that will be useful and interesting for students from various disciplines. Not only in English presentation courses but for other classes taught online or using blended learning courses, various tools for interactive learning and SCL should be considered when designing lessons and materials in the future. While we do not know yet how the COVID-19 pandemic will affect education in the long term, we must adapt to the present situation to effectively work with the current students living with this new situation.

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