

## **Action Research Final Report in 2019-2020**

### **1. Title: How students' ability improve through Focus-on-Form instruction and Communication Strategies**

#### **2. Context**

- (1) Class: Senior high school 1st year students
- (2) Class size: 1 class with 26 students (10 male and 16 females) 50 minutes
- (3) Subject: English Expression I
- (4) Textbook: "Vision Quest –Revised English Expression I Standard" (KEIRINKAN)
- (5) Levels of my students: "a highly-selective class" at school.
- (6) Problem I face: I taught my students English Expression I in a traditional way, such as to teach grammar at first, the students did drills then. I found that some students looked sleepy when I explained a grammar in English and Japanese. I felt the necessity to change my class.

#### **3. Goal**

Students are able to talk about their own ideas in English and listen to others.

For that,

- 1) Students can improve their listening and speaking skills based on focus on form.
- 2) Students have confidence about their listening and speaking ability based on focus on form.
- 3) Students can improve their overall communicative competence.

#### **4. Literature review**

##### **(a) Communicative Language Teaching: CLT**

Savignon(2002) explained about CLT that " The essence of CLT is the engagement of learners in communication to allow them to develop their communicative competence"(p.22). Then, what does communicative competence stands for? Canal and Swain (1980) defined communicative competence "The four components of communicative competence that (1) grammatical competence, (2) sociolinguistic competence, (3) discourse competence, and (4) strategic competence. (p.40)" Savignon(1997) also explained that " Communication is the expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning; and communicative competence is always context specific, requiring the simultaneous, integrated use of grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence" (p.225). He pointed out that an inverted pyramid suggests a possible relationship between them and an

increase in one component interacts with the other components to produce a corresponding increase in overall communicative competence.

### **(b) Grammar teaching**

There are many ways to teach grammar in education. It was common to teach grammar in traditional approach in Japan; Grammar was taught using the Grammar- Translation Method or Audio-Lingual Method. However, according to Lightbown(1983) cited that not only was intensive drilling ineffective, it actually delayed the acquisition of the structures and forms that were drilled. According to VanPatten and Oikennon (1996), “the activities alone (the structured input activities) constituted the necessary and sufficient aspect of the instruction that would lead to learner’s improvement.” Sanz and Morgan-Short (2003) also found that “not only is explanation unnecessary, but with carefully constructed activities, even feedback seems to be unnecessary.” Then, what is the important thing to teach grammar? According to Lee & VanPatten (1995, p133), “there is an implicit linguistic system, one that exists outside of awareness.” They also found that “meaning-bearing input is a necessary ingredient for successful acquisition.” There are some studies about it. For example, according to Terrell(1986, 1991), “producing an utterance in a language minimally involves two processes or abilities: (1) the ability to express a particular meaning via a particular form or structure; (2) the ability to string forms and structures together in appropriate ways.” As Terrell pointed out that while input processing is linked to acquiring form and structure, access is linked to accuracy(correctness) and fluency(ease and speed) in output. Terrell also cited that “implication for language instruction is that learners need not only input to build a developing system but also opportunities to create output in order to work on fluency and accuracy.”( Lee& VanPatten,1995,p 170)

### **(c) Focus on form**

According to Lee& VanPatten(1995, p.168), “the activities that focus on structured input that learners must eventually use a form or structure in their output.” Ellis(2006, p100) also explained that “ Focus on form entails a focus on meaning with attention to form arising out of the communicative activity.” He claimed that “Although there is now a clear conviction that a traditional approach

to teaching grammar based on explicit explanations and drill-like practice is unlikely to result in the acquisition of the implicit knowledge needed for fluent and accurate communication (p.102)” He stated ten beliefs about grammar teaching. “(1) The grammar taught should be one that emphasizes not just form but also the meanings and uses of different grammatical structures. (4) A focus-on-forms approach is valid as long as it includes an opportunity for learners to practice behavior in communicative tasks. (6) Use should be made of both input-based and output-based instructional options. (9) Corrective feedback is important for learning grammar. It is best conducted using a mixture of implicit and explicit feedback types that are both input based and output based. (10) In accordance with these beliefs, grammar instruction should take the form of separate grammar lessons (a focus-on-forms approach) and should also be integrated into communicative activities (a focus-on-form approach)”.

#### **(d) Oral Testing**

Krashen and Terrell(1983) stated “[Testing] can be done in a way that will have a positive effect on the student’s progress.” Also, “if we want students to acquire a second language, we should give tests that promote the use of acquisition activities [in and out of the classroom].” (Krashen& Terrell, 1983, p.165) Then, how can teachers teach oral testing? Lee& VanPatten gave an example called a washback effect. A washback effect is “testing cannot be viewed as an isolated event; it must be an integral part of the teaching and learning enterprise.” (Lee& VanPatten, 1995, p.100) “Oral testing in classrooms should be conducted a one-on-one interview with an information-exchange task. It is because the test taker alone does most of the communicative burden, which is defined as the responsibility of an individual test taker to initiate, respond, manage, and manage an oral event. The communicative burden of a test format is oral quiz or an oral test.” Then, “the type of test can influence both *what* instructors emphasize and the *way* in which they emphasize it.”(Lee& VanPatten, 1995, p.101) They explained that “if the content of the oral test is overtly tied to classroom activities, then learners are provided a stronger motivation for participating in the activities.” (p.101)

#### **(e) Evaluation Criteria for Testing**

Lowe pointed out that using holistic scores implies that “language proficiency is viewed as a unitary ability, with scores ‘expressed in a single global rating of general language ability (Lowe, 1988, p.12).” How teachers assess the students’ oral tests? Bachman& Palmer proposes that “tests of oral proficiency be evaluated using componential scoring criteria and provides the following criteria used in a test of oral proficiency (Bachman & Palmer, 1983)”. “The three scales assess grammatical, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic competence. Each component contributes a different amount to the total final score.”

## **5. What I did**

My goal is to speak English through focus on form. In the first semester, I taught my students English Expression I in a traditional approach. At that time, students memorized example sentences for tests. They recite sentences during the class, but they don’t speak English freely. For this reason, I decided to introduce Focus on form and conversation strategies.

### **(a) Speaking with Conversation Strategies**

I learned Conversation Strategies (CS) from SLT class. At that time, students were not able to talk naturally. They just asked and answered questions automatically. So, I felt it is important for students to exchange their opinions freely. Then, I put three things into practice below. First, I started with openers and closers such as “How are you?”, “Nice talking with you!”. When they share the idea with their partners, I let them start openers and finish closers. At first, they didn’t get used to using these strategies, but they seemed to enjoy talking afterwards. Second, I introduced fillers, such as “Hmm...”, “Let me see/ think”. Then, I introduced rejoinders, such as “Oh, really?”, “Aha”. Lastly, I introduced follow-up questions. At first, I let them read a script which is used CS. However, it seemed difficult for them to use it. So, I let them practice in each lesson. At first, their conversation was not natural. After practicing, they got used to using them. Students used CS, not only worksheets of Focus on Form, but also speaking practice and test.

### **(b) Speaking test**

Students have a speaking test in each semester. In the first semester, they did a speech

in front of other students. I learned from SLT that speaking test should be connected to the grammar which students learned. So, I did a timed-conversation test in each test. It was for the first time to assess two students at one time. So, other colleagues complained the performance test and the criteria. We discussed a lot and made the criteria in a way. There is still more room for improvement, though. Since I have learned about “washback effects”, I showed the assessment to students. Then, I let them practice in each lesson and switch their partner for several times. It is because students don’t know who their partner is until the test starts, so they need to communicate with anyone. As I wrote above, students used CS in the performance test. Then, they were able to talk more than two minutes.

**(c) Fun Essay**

I integrated speaking and writing task which connects the target grammar. Students write a topic and use a grammar. Though they tried it only twice, the goals of the number of words are increased. Before writing a fun essay, they shared their own essay with other students. They did a peer-editing and they got a rubric for the essay. Teachers evaluated their essay with four categories; length, grammar, content and design. When I introduced peer-editing, students just commented the other students’ essay and they didn’t correct grammar. After exchanging them several times, they realized where the wrong sentences are. For example, some students found singular “-s”, the focused grammar.

**6. Results**

**(a) Data from students’ self-evaluation**

Since the school was closed because of the coronavirus, I could collect data of 22 out of 26 students. However, some students didn’t answer properly, I chose 19 students’ questionnaire.

Table1. How long students were able to talk with their partner.

How much I was able to talk in English. ▾	April	March
1minute somehow	9	1
1minute fluently	1	4
1,5minutes somehow	7	3
1,5minutes fluently	0	3
2minutes somehow	2	7
2minutes or more fluently	0	1

Table 1 shows that how long students were able to talk with their partner in a performance test or practicing. In April, nine students were able to talk within 1 minutes somehow and seven students were able to talk for 1,5 minutes. Six students have decreased in March compared to April. Eight students were able to talk 2 minutes somehow in March. From April to July, I let my students do a speech in which it takes within 1 minute. This is why the table shows the number of students who were able to talk with their partner has increased.

Table 2: I am able to use Conversation Strategies of Fillers and Rejoinders

I am able to use Conversation Strategies	Fillers	Fillers2	Rejoinders	Rejoinders
	April	March	April	March
with 3 or more variation appropriately	1	2	1	3
with 3 or more properly	1	1	2	1
with 2 or more variation appropriately	1	5	0	6
with 2 or more variation properly	2	6	4	6
with 1time	8	5	6	3
I cannot use it	6	0	6	0

Table 2 shows that how often students can use conversation strategies of fillers and rejoinders. In April, six students cannot use fillers and eight students can use it only once. I have taught my students CS since September. Then, they get to use it through practicing for performance tests. In March, seven students can use it with twice or more variation properly. The same tendency happens about rejoinders. In April, six students cannot use it and six students can use it only once. Through practicing CS, six students can use it with twice or more variation properly, and six students can use it appropriately.

Chart1: Do you have a positive attitude to learn English Expression I in class?

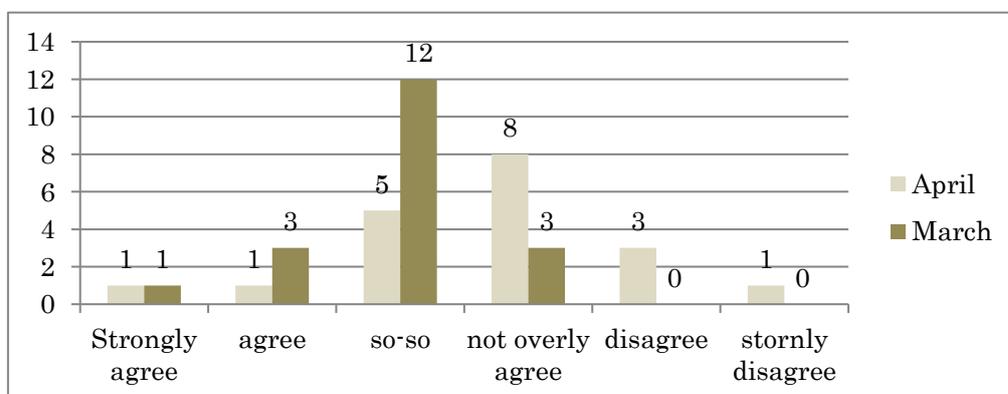


Table2. Students' comments

- The class is fun because I can talk with my friends. (6)
- I like English, so I have a positive attitude.(3)
- I think grammar is important to study English. (2)
- I feel I can understand English. (2)
- Everyone works hard, so do I.(1)
- At first, I felt I don't want to do a performance test because I was shy, but I am not shy anymore and enjoy talking. (1)
- It is useful. (1)

Table3. Students' negative comments

- I feel pair work is a bit nuisance. (1)
- I want to do group work.(1)

Chart2: Is it an effective way to learn grammar through communicative activities?

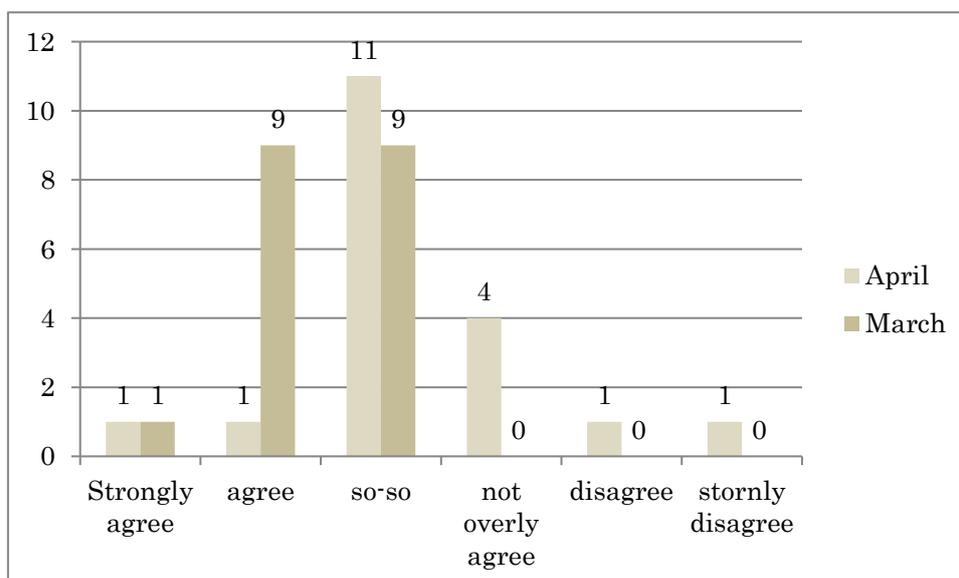


Table 4 Students' comments

- I can ask to my partner what I don't understand. (5)
- It is fun. (5)
- I think it is important to talk with other people.(4)
- It is easy to remember when I talk with my friends. (4)
- I get to understand how to talk in English using conversation strategies. (2)

Table 5 Students' negative comments

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● I don't understand the grammar point, and I can't ask my partner. (1)</li></ul> |
|---|

Chart1 shows that twelve students didn't have a positive attitude in the beginning because some of them didn't like English and grammar. Through a year, the number has decreased. Then, sixteen students have a positive attitude. As students' comments show, students need time to talk with their friends. It seems that the reason why the number of having a positive attitude has increased is the time to think and talk with their partners. The similar result is in Chart 2. It shows that how students think about Focus on Form approach. Ten students agree that to learn grammar through communicative activities is an effective way in March. It is important for students to talk with other people to understand the grammar.

## 7. What I learned

It was quite fruitful experience for me since I have entered NUFs in September. At first, I didn't know how I teach grammar, so I used Japanese a lot in the class. When I see other teachers' action research, I got to understand how to teach in Focus on Form approach. I also didn't know how to assess the performance test, and connect the performance test to the target grammar. Before doing action research, I thought that teachers should make a creative performance test but it was wrong. Teachers have to think how students use the grammar which they learn in class. I also learned two things; conversation strategies and the integration of two skills. As reported the result from the students' self-evaluation sheets, students had a positive attitude to use Conversation Strategies. After practicing many times, they seemed to get used to using fillers and rejoinders. As for the integration of two skills, such as speaking test and writing test (fun essay), it is quite effective for students to remember the grammar. Some students wrote that they got to have confidence that they can speak English because they practiced a lot in class. I also learned that students can improve a lot if teachers give tasks and scaffold well. At first, I thought students cannot talk using a focus on form worksheet because they have never learned a new grammar. However, they seemed to understand a target grammar through pair work. Also, I thought students cannot talk more than two minutes, and write around 60 words because these tasks are tough for 1<sup>st</sup> grade high school students. However, they did a two-minute talk and wrote a fun essay more than 60 words in third term. Throughout a half year, my views about

English language teaching has changed through this course. I have changed my teaching style since September. I was worried to change style from the middle of semester and I thought a traditional method is effective. By altering the current situation, students and I have improved the way of learning.

## **8. Future issues**

In the future, I would like to try the integration of four skills. Since I have learned that the integration of two skills worked well and students seemed to be easy to remember. Furthermore, I would like my students to try follow-up questions in a performance test.

## References

Ellis, R. (2006). Current issues in the teaching of grammar: An SLA perspective. *TESOL quarterly*, 40(1), 83-107.

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Lesson Plan

Name: Ariko Nishimura

Objectives: Students can understand relative pronoun and talk about your favorite thing( movies/ books/ singers)

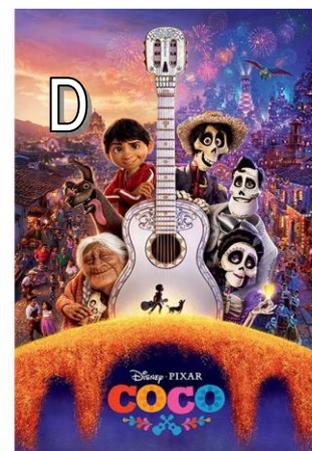
Time	Interaction T-Ss, S-S, S	Activity & Procedure	Things to say
1	T-Ss	greetings	How are you today? It's a day today, isn't it?
3	T-Ss	Small talk: " your favorite movie" + additional questions	Use CS
6	S-S	Students talk about their favorite movies.	Work with a new partner for three times
25	S-S	Focus on Form worksheet	
3	T-Ss	Understanding what students do as a performance test	
10	S-S	Practicing for performance test	
2	T-S	Summary	

Input(Miwako)

Let's talk about movies!

1. Do you know these movies? Match the titles, pictures and stories.

Titles	Pictures	Stories
BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY		
Beauty and the Beast		
COCO		
The Greatest Showman		



Stories

(1) It's a movie about a boy <u>who</u> travel to the Land of the Dead. He looks for a person <u>who</u> helps the boy's <u>problem</u> .	(2) It's about a magician <u>who</u> wants to have own <u>circus</u> . So, he hired characteristic people <u>who</u> <u>dance as a musical</u> .	(3) It's about a singer <u>whose</u> songs were quite <u>famous all over the world</u> . We can see how famous songs were born.
(4) It's a story about a beast <u>which</u> get to find to <u>love and to be loved</u> .		

2. 一番興味のある映画に1をつけ、順に最も興味のない映画まで2～6を付けなさい。

BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY \_\_\_\_\_ Beauty and the Beast \_\_\_\_\_ COCO \_\_\_\_\_  
The Greatest Showman \_\_\_\_\_



7組 西村クラスのみなさんへ

この調査は、みなさんのこれまでの英語の学習について把握し、今後の授業に役立てるのに使います。テストではありませんので正直にお答えください。空欄のないようよろしくお願いします。 15分程度です。

アンケートが書いたら、西村に直接渡すか職員室にもってきてください。 ご協力よろしくお願いします。

Part1

4月から英語の力に変化がありましたか。4月は○で現在は□で番号を囲み、当てはまる番号をマークしてください。

1. 話す力について (授業の Small Talk で)

- 6 2分間はなめらかに話すことができる      5 2分間は3、4回つまりながら話すことができる  
4 1分30秒間はなめらかに話すことができる      3 1分30秒間は3、4回止つまりながら話すことができる  
2 1分間はなめらかに話すことができる      1 1分間は3、4回止つまりながら話すことができる

2. 聞く力について

- 6 先生や友達の英語の8割以上理解できる      5 先生や友達の英語の7割以上理解できる  
4 先生や友達の英語の6割以上理解できる      3 先生や友達の英語の4割以上理解できる  
2 先生や友達の英語の3割くらいなら理解できる      1 先生や友達の英語が理解できない

3. 書く力について Fun Essay に使用した語数

- 6 80語以上書くことができる      5 70語以上書くことができる  
4 60語以上書くことができる      3 40語以上書くことができる  
2 20語程度しか書くことができない      1 書くことができない

4. Conversation Strategies について

(1) Fillers (Well / Let me see / Ah など)

- 6 3回以上適切にさまざまな表現を使うことができる      5 3回以上適切に使うことができる  
4 2回以上適切にさまざまな表現を使うことができる      3 2回以上適切に使うことができる  
2 1回は使うことができる      1 使うことができない

(2) Rejoinders (I see. Nice. Really?などを使ってあいづちを打つ)

- 6 3回以上適切にさまざまな表現を使うことができる      5 3回以上適切に使うことができる  
4 2回以上適切にさまざまな表現を使うことができる      3 2回以上適切に使うことができる  
2 1回は使うことができる      1 使うことができない

Part2

4月から英語表現 I の授業を受講してどのような変化がありましたか。4月は○で現在は□で番号を囲み、当てはまる番号をマークしてください。

1. 英語で話すことについて、どう感じていますか？

4 言いたいことがかなり自由に話せる 3 多少の間違ひはあるが言いたいことは言える  
2 片言だが何とか言いたいことが言える 1 かなり片言で単語を2、3個並べる程度である

2. 英語表現 I の授業に前向きですか。また、それはなぜですか。

6 とてもそう思う 5 そう思う 4 まあまあ思う 3 あまり思わない 2 そう思わない 1 全く思わない

3. コミュニケーション活動（ペアワークなど）を通して文法を学ぶことは効果的ですか。また、それはなぜですか。

6 とてもそう思う 5 そう思う 4 まあまあ思う 3 あまり思わない 2 そう思わない 1 全く思わない

4. Performance test 練習（授業の最初に行う英会話）に前向きに参加していますか。また、それはなぜですか。

6 とてもそう思う 5 そう思う 4 まあまあ思う 3 あまり思わない 2 そう思わない 1 全く思わない

5. Fun Essay(最後にやったもの)は前向きですか。またその理由を書いてください。

6 とてもそう思う 5 そう思う 4 まあまあ思う 3 あまり思わない 2 そう思わない 1 全く思わない

6. 授業時間以外でどのくらい英語を学習していますか。また、どのような学習をしていますか

6 ほぼ毎日している 5 週5日程度 4 週4日程度 3 週3日程度 2 週1、2日程度 1 全くしていない

Part3

1. Performance test 練習 への参加状況はどうでしたか？



6. Conversation Strategies についてどれくらい使えますか？あてはまるものを1つ選んでください。

Openers (How are you doing? etc) / Closers (Nice talking with you.)

4月	必ず毎回使う	たまに忘れるがだいたい使える	時々忘れる	どちらかを忘れる	できない
現在	必ず毎回使う	たまに忘れるがだいたい使える	時々忘れる	どちらかを忘れる	できない

7. Rejoinders (I see. That's nice. That's too bad. Oh yeah? Uh-huh. Really? etc.)

4月	5種類以上できる	3～4種類できる	2種類できる	1種類できる	できない
現在	5種類以上できる	3～4種類できる	2種類できる	1種類できる	できない

Part5. 4月から英語表現Ⅰの授業を受講してどのような変化がありましたか。下の項目についてそれぞれ答えてください。

1. 今年度4月から授業を通してどのような成長がありましたか。(話す力・聞く力・書く力や文法、英語に対する意識など)

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2. パフォーマンステストを行うことで、あなたの英語にどのような変化がありましたか。

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3. 授業で困ったときや、よりよく話したり書いたりするために友達から学んだことを具体的に書いてください。

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4. 授業の雰囲気はどんな様子ですか。また、あなたの英語学習にどう影響していますか。

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5. 授業の感想や質問を書いてください。


ご協力ありがとうございました。