

Can Notecard Instruction Reduce Script Dependency in EFL Student Presentations? A Classroom Inquiry

Hasegawa, Rachel

Nippon Veterinary and Life Science University

Abstract

This paper was motivated by teacher observations of a widely-used but ineffective presentation technique often employed by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students – reading aloud of full scripts. This skill-limiting approach was identified in an EFL class of students of veterinary science. Subsequently, an action research framework was applied to systematically explore student perspectives and implement a targeted intervention to facilitate competent production and use of notecards to enhance student delivery skills when presenting.

Keywords: EFL, presentation, notecards, classroom research

1. Background to the study

English oral presentation courses are often a standard component of a university English as a Foreign Language curriculum in Japan. Presentation skills also play a significant role in EFL integrated learning environments and are a key element of 21st-century skill competencies (Pardede, 2020). A common teacher observation when it comes to such skills is that many students are overly dependent on scripts or rote memorization when presenting, resulting in negative implications for the quality of delivery features, such as eye contact, body language, vocal variety and presence. Moreover, a regular topic for staff room discussion is why notecards are seldom used by students as a tool to support presentations, even when they are clearly directed to do so. The literature on this topic is

sparse and perhaps notecard use is not considered a significant issue for exploration.

However, the practical matter of coaching students away from the persistent reading of scripts and towards notecards to facilitate improved delivery skills is an ongoing task for EFL teachers.

On noting this tendency in an EFL classroom at a veterinary school in Japan, a short action research study was initiated, firstly, to gain an insight into student dependence on full scripts while presenting and secondly, to deal with this issue in a considered and systematic manner to encourage a real shift to notecard use in EFL presenting.

To provide context before addressing the action research itself, this paper will first briefly consider the teaching of notecards for presentations, secondly, examine the inferior strategies students frequently opt for, and thirdly, confirm the practical benefits of notecards for EFL students.

1.1 Teaching presentation skills and the status of notecards

In a presentation skills course where there are time constraints and a prescribed syllabus, certain presentation features such as the teaching of structure, research techniques or the use of visuals may be prioritized over delivery skills. In a discussion of a small study of differing teacher approaches to teaching presentation skills, Paxton and Truxal (2019) comment that “.....*with the subjective nature of teaching presentation skills, students may have very different experiences in their presentation skills class depending on the particular areas of focus emphasized by their teacher*”. However, in the Japanese EFL university context, it is often the delivery of a presentation where the most fossilized habits occur, for instance avoidance of eye contact, lack of vocal projection and reading of scripts, while overlooking notecards as a tool. Teacher attention to the use of notecards provides an opportunity to facilitate improved student presentation skills in a number of

ways by engaging the audience, promoting a natural delivery and cultivating a skilled and competent demeanor.

One reason why teachers may not highlight notecard use as a priority is that the choice of mainstream presentation skills textbooks offering systematic coverage of notecards is limited (Fec, 2019). The series, *Present Yourself* (Gershon, 2015) does provide activities to raise awareness of notecards and offers guidance and practice activities that recur throughout the book. This focus substantiates the role of the notecard as a standard part of a presentation. However, for most presentation skills textbooks, teachers must create appropriate supplemental notecard materials to integrate into the prescribed textbook framework and promote notecard use as a credible delivery tool.

1.2 Frequently used student delivery strategies and reasons for choices

As noted in 1.1, students rarely elect to employ notecards as an aid when presenting, instead choosing other methods for assistance in recall and other aspects of presenting. These methods include:

- relying on rote-memorization alone
- unbroken reading of a script
- reciting from a sentence-heavy memo
- reading from blocks of text on slides

Such choices commonly result in limited proficiency when it comes to certain aspects of presentation delivery. There are a number of potential reasons why students choose these methods in spite of the negative impact they often have on presentation skills, as discussed below.

1.2.1 What the learner is used to

Secondary school English education in Japan still focuses heavily on rote learning and memorization as a tool to internalize the grammar and vocabulary required for high school and university entrance exams at the expense of communicative proficiency (Kikuchi, 2015). It is hardly surprising therefore that many students apply these familiar strategies that have formed a significant part of their English language study experience to oral communication tasks when they reach tertiary education. Moreover, students may well be influenced by the style of presenting long-established in their L1 culture. In traditional Japanese presentations, a polished, memorized performance using formal, tentative language is standard. Preparation is intensive with the production of thorough, precise written scripts. Presenters then rely on rote memorization and repeated practice is undertaken to achieve smooth, error-free speeches. Subsequent application of the same techniques to EFL presentations at university often has negative results. Students frequently create scripts that they memorize and recall for the presentation or simply read out loud without any consideration for the meaning or delivery style. These strategies habitually result in a mechanical address or monotonous reading tone respectively, with faulty pacing and few prosodic features.

1.2.2 Learner anxiety

According to Elliot and Vasquez (2022), students maintained that giving presentations is one of the greatest sources of anxiety in the EFL classroom. Students feel safe and less anxious if they can just read from a script or other sentence-based resource. This reduces the chances of feeling humiliated in front of their classmates by forgetting words or content.

1.2.3 Choosing the easy option for preparation

Falout & Maruyama (2004), in their paper investigating student motivation, reported from the National Center for University Entrance Examination's university

teacher survey (1999). 84.8% of teachers accounted for a decline in student academic performance over the preceding decade as being due to the fact that, “*Motivation to tackle assignments voluntarily and willingly is lacking.*” (ibid). Putting together a presentation takes time and effort and requires commitment. With low motivation to complete an assignment satisfactorily, students may look for shortcuts. Producing a script and reading it aloud eliminates certain key steps from the presentation creation process i.e. internalizing the content and practicing the presentation with the quality of delivery in mind. Most EFL teachers will be familiar with students who are not inclined to complete all the steps and prefer to choose the quickest route, script writing only.

Another possible factor in choosing to read from a full script is academic dishonesty, for example resorting to plagiarism or overuse of AI tools. (Warrick, 2023) advocates for cutting out full script writing for student presentations and instead focusing on outlines alone. By doing so he noticed positive outcomes for features such as gesture use, expressive speech, and interaction with the audience with his student group.

1.2.4 Lack of awareness of alternative methods

Finally, students may not have encountered other methods to assist them in their presentation performance. The motivation to deliver a presentation effectively may be there, but students may simply not have the know-how or skills to do so.

Dornyei (2018) defines the notion of student engagement as requiring two parts, motivation and implementation. Motivation alone is not always sufficient for engagement with a learning task in a foreign language to be effective. By interceding and providing students with the knowledge to implement new delivery techniques such as notecards, the teacher may advance successful student engagement in giving a presentation in English without reading a script or rote-memorization. Additionally, students have the option to discard the poor presentation practices described.

1.3 Practical benefits of using notecards when presenting

Notecards can play a supportive role in presentations by helping speakers organize their ideas, stay on track, and deliver their message effectively. Here's a detailed look at the benefits:

- **Quick easy-to-view roadmap**

Working with notecards gives the student a visible structure to their presentation so that they can see where they are going at a quick glance. Important words are highlighted and stand out, so are easy to retrieve with a quick look.

- **Aid to memory recall and managing anxiety**

Students can design their notecards to match their presentation needs. Initially, notecards can feature longer phrases for reassurance and to reduce any anxiety that may arise from using a new technique. The volume of text can be reduced to keywords as competence and confidence grows. Similarly, any feelings of anxiety can be managed by adding delivery cues such as SLOW, RELAX, PAUSE.

- **Facilitate learner awareness of linguistic limitations**

By making and practicing with notecards, students can gauge the language level and complexity of ideas that are appropriate for their proficiency, something that is often overestimated when students use full scripts or rote memorization for delivery. Additionally, by aiming for a more attainable level of English, the reduced cognitive load may allow for attention to other aspects of presenting such as audience engagement.

- **Efficient use of time and natural delivery**

If time is limited, notecards can be made from an outline, not just a script. Students can spend the time available practicing and adjusting the notecards to facilitate a natural delivery with attention to vocal features and audience engagement.

- **Simple principles, simple tool**

Once students have been taught the principles of making and using notecards, these criteria can be used and fine-tuned for subsequent presentations. As they become more proficient, students can personalize the cards and delivery style to suit their own individual needs and personal delivery style.

2. Methodology

2.1 Class Setting and Participants

The participants comprised 45 first-year undergraduate veterinary science majors taking a required weekly English Communication course at a veterinary university in Tokyo. The class comprised students with diverse levels of English proficiency and varying degrees of experience, ranging from students with minimal exposure to English communication to returnee students who had received a number of years of education in English-speaking countries.

The assigned ESP textbook for this class had a thematic organization focused on veterinary-related texts, which was adapted to facilitate inclusion of communicative activities and tasks. The classes were held once a week, one session comprising 100 minutes in a 14-class semester.

One component of the course was student presentations. Students initially had only one class session on the structure and delivery of a presentation (including a brief introduction to notecards) with a short follow-up session the following week. Students then went on to give a short, informal presentation every third or fourth class. The

presentation themes were based on topics connected to textbook content and of interest to students of veterinary science. Each time, the teacher provided scaffolded preparation templates for planning, including text-free, postcard-sized templates for hand-written or typed notecards. The students presented individually in front of 6-8 peers.

For the first and second presentations, the teacher focused on providing student feedback relating to content (based on submitted written documents) and delivery (evaluated in real-time). After the first presentation, students were reminded that notecard creation and use was part of the grading scheme for content preparation and delivery. The class was advised again that reading of full scripts was not permitted, and that notecards should be used to help in recall and for support. In addition, personalized written feedback was given, with comments regarding excessive reading of scripts made where necessary prior to the second presentation.

2.2 Initial observations and identification of problem

As described above, over the initial two presentation sessions, multiple students were observed reading directly from full scripts. There was little or no referral to notecards and many students made very little eye contact or displayed any signs of audience engagement. These approaches were noted for individual students in the teacher gradebook and subsequently extracted as data for Table 1 below.

Table 1.*Proportion of Students Observed Continuously Reading from Scripts During Presentations*

	Presentation 1	Presentation 2
Teacher Observation		
Proportion of students clearly reading from full scripts throughout their presentation.	21/45	13/45
Number of Students: 45		

It should be noted that, beyond the data in Table 1, additional class members were identified as using mixed methods of recall and delivery, such as reading intermittently from phones, text-heavy slides and other obscured documents. However, at this early investigative stage, data collection was limited to the clearly identifiable script-reading behaviour recorded above.

During both presentations, the teacher additionally recognized that most students were not using notecards. The notecards that were visible seemed to be of poor quality, with issues such as small paper size, tiny text, text written in pencil, lack of attention to layout, full sentences used, inclusion of unhelpful functional words with no lexical meaning and a lack of attention to other notecard considerations.

2.3 Research question

While most students were successful in creating well-organized, cohesive content with good detail, the teacher flagged the fact that for many students the delivery was not successful, predominantly due to a reliance on heavy reading from scripts. From this the following research questions emerged:

- What is the student knowledge and experience of notecards as a presentation tool?

- Can the explicit teaching of notecards as a useful tool encourage adoption by students as an alternative to reading of scripts during a presentation?

3. Pre-intervention instruments, findings and analysis

3.1 Instrument - student survey

A pre-intervention Microsoft Form Survey was created, with the first few questions devised to get an insight into previous student experience with notecards for presentations. Next, two identical sets of questions were posed regarding approaches to preparation and delivery, one for the first student presentation and one for the second. Each question set focused on:

- a. identifying students who DID NOT create notecards – their reasoning behind this and the other delivery choices they made.
- b. identifying students who DID create notecards and their perspective on notecard use and other delivery choices.

The survey question types included single and multiple-answer choices, and short-answer texts. Branching-type questions were also used to gain specificity. All questions were provided in both English and Japanese.

3.2 Key Findings from Pre-intervention Survey and Analysis

As we can see from Table 2 below, approximately half of the class had previously had some experience of notecards for presenting. However, what was not predicted was that the great majority of students had never had any guidance regarding notecards for presenting. This could provide an explanation for the observed lack of notecard use by many students and the ineffective notecard creation by others. Additionally, students may

naturally not recognize the benefits of adopting notecards if they have never been prominently featured in the classroom as a positive option.

Table 2.

Student Past Experience of Using Notecards for 1. Presenting and 2. Receiving Guidance on Making Notecards

Survey Questions	Student Responses	
	Yes	No
1. Before joining this class, had you ever made notecards for presentations?	29	26
2. Before joining this class, had you ever been taught or given guidance on how to make notecards for presentations?	42	3
Number of Students = 45		

The subsequent survey questions (Table 3) were tabulated according to whether students made notecards or not.

3.2.1 Focus on students who didn't make notecards

Student survey responses regarding notecard creation showed that the number of students who stated that they had not made notecards was much smaller than expected. Those who failed to create notecards placed different causes as their principal reason, with lack of knowledge of how to produce the cards, time factors or simply not wanting to use them selected as the main causes. In addition, several students indicated a simple preference for not using notecards. Students were then asked to select the method that they had used for delivery (instead of notecards). Reading a full script or memorization were confirmed as strategies used, with no students choosing the “other” option.

For the second presentation, the 6/39 students who stated they did not create cards used script reading or memorization to deliver their message. The survey answers for those who neglected to create notecards had been anticipated but this confirmation was helpful in determining how to proceed with an intervention.

Table 3.

Summary of Findings Focusing on Students Who Did Not Create Notecards

Pre-intervention Presentations Survey Questions	Presentation 1		Presentation 2	
	(Yes)	<u>No</u>	(Yes)	<u>No</u>
3. Did you make notecards for the presentation?	(35)	<u>10</u>	(39)	<u>6</u>
STUDENTS WHO ANSWERED <u>NO</u> to Q3:				
4. For what main reason did you <u>not</u> make notecards?	I didn't know how to.	4	I didn't know how to.	1
	I didn't have time.	3	I didn't have time.	2
	I didn't want to use them.	2	I didn't want to use them.	2
	I wanted to memorize.	-	I wanted to memorize.	1
	I didn't know which words to choose.	1	I didn't know which words to choose.	-
5. How did you deliver the content of your presentation?	By memorizing it.	2	By memorizing it.	4
	By reading the full script.	8	By reading full script	2
	Other	-	Other	-
Total Number of Students = 45				

3.2.2 Focus on students who did make notecards

From Table 4 below, a high proportion of the class signaled that they had created presentation notecards (35/45 students in the first presentation and 39/45 in the second). These numbers required attention as they did not match the teacher observations that prompted this study. Teacher feedback for the two initial presentations clearly identified 21/45 and 13/45 students reading from a script uninterrupted and with little audience engagement (Table 1). Additionally, other students were seen to be focused on different

methods for delivery, as noted previously. One possible way to account for this discrepancy is that students had created notecards for the presentations but declined to implement them. This can be supported for the first presentation to some extent, as 18 out of the 35 students who stated that they made notecards revealed that they did not use notecards exclusively but also relied on other strategies (Table 4). However, for the second presentation, a much higher number, 36/45 students claimed that they had referred to notecards alone as a presentation aid, clearly not substantiated by teacher observations. As noted in Section 2.1, prior to the second presentation, students were reminded that notecard use was graded, reading full scripts was not permitted and corrective feedback was given to students who read scripts. This could have been a motivating factor in selecting the answer to Questions 6 and 7 with students preferring not to reveal the more appropriate answers out of concern for their grades.

Table 4.

Summary of Key Findings Focusing on Students Who Created Notecards

Survey Questions	Presentation 1		Presentation 2	
	Yes	(No)	Yes	(No)
6. Did you make notecards for the presentation?	<u>35</u>	(10)	<u>39</u>	(6)
	Yes	(No)	Yes	(No)
7. Did you used the notecards ONLY when you gave your presentation (no other scripts or papers)?	<u>18</u>	(17)	<u>36</u>	(3)
Total Number of Students = 45				

Potential causes of non-exclusive use of notecards noted above were offered in the survey and students selected their reason(s), as shown in Table 5 below. The findings reveal that a recurring reason was that students were concerned about speaking fluently

using only the notecard's keywords (selected 10 times out of a total of 25 selections). Two further reasons selected with a combined frequency of 10 times (6 and 4 times/25) were 1. reading the script as an easier choice and 2. having no time to practice. In both cases, this suggests either a lack of student motivation to explore presenting with notecards alone or students don't have the expertise for implementation. This therefore again points to a need for teacher intervention to explain the merits of notecard use and to coach students from the notecard design stage to effective employment in their presentation delivery.

Table 5.

Pre-intervention Survey Question to Determine Student Reasons for Non-exclusive Use of Notecards in Their Presentations

Survey question: For what reasons did you NOT use notecards only when presenting?		Presentation 1 (17 respondents)	Presentation 2 (3 respondents)
Multiple choice answers (more than one selection possible):			
• I was worried that I wouldn't be able to speak fluently from the keywords in the notecard.		10	
• I decided it was easier to read the script.		6	1
• I didn't have time to practice.		4	1
• I preferred to memorize my script and speak without notecards.		4	1
• I wasn't confident that my notecards contained the key words.		1	
• Other			
Total number of selections		25	3

4. Teacher intervention

With the findings in mind, a set of materials was devised and subsequently employed for a 100-minute class with the aim of explicitly instructing students on the advantages of using notecards, providing guidance on creating with effective format and content and the physical use of notecards during presentations.

4.1. Teaching the benefits of using notecards

Potential benefits were first elicited in pairs. Then students checked their predictions by examining an information map that documented evidence-based outcomes from using notecards for presentation skills (Figure 1, Appendix 1).

The advantages of notecards for presenting were then expanded upon by the teacher, along with the possible drawbacks of choosing other methods such as reading from a script or memorization. Mercer and Puchta (2023) encourage teachers to, “*Explain your rationale for a task.*”. This comes from the expectation-value theory that proposes that in a task, student expectation of success in combination with an awareness of the value of it motivates them to engage. The specific benefits of using notecards were lent credibility by providing the students with simple reference to academic sources where appropriate. For example, students were advised of a study that showed a positive effect of notecards on anxiety (Sukmana et al., 2023).

4.2 Teaching how to create effective notecards for presenting

As proposed in this paper, a knowledge gap regarding the creation of notecards may contribute to students' reluctance to utilize them during presentations. Therefore, students were guided through a list of practical points to assist in the creation of well-designed, easy-to-read notecards using student handouts.

4.2.1 Key features of a notecard

Firstly, the learning focus was on the effective features of notecards (Figure 2, Appendix 1). Points included:

- Notecard size and material
- Importance of open space – not too busy
- One notecard per slide
- Large, clear print (if handwritten)
- Font choice and size (if typed)
- Bullet points/ symbols/ colour-coding
- Numbering and labelling- order sequentially
- Well-chosen keywords only, no sentences

- Delivery cues (e.g. pause, eye contact, slow down)

4.2.2 Instruction using a sample notecard

In a recent lesson, students had studied a passage from the class textbook on Feline AIDS which was structured into four sections: Background, Symptoms, Diagnosis, and Treatment. For the next student presentation (post- intervention), students would give a short presentation on an animal disease of their choice. As an important part of the intervention process, the teacher prepared sample materials consisting of a presentation outline for a goat disease (Figure 3, Appendix 1), CAE, organized into the same sections as the passage on Feline Aids that had been studied previously. Sample notecards (Figure 4, Appendix 1), which corresponded to the goat disease outline, were provided for pair work discussion with students directed to compare the notecards and the effective notecard features covered in Section 4.2.1, with teacher consolidation after this activity (Figure 2, Appendix 1).

4.2.3 Practical tips for using notecards during a presentation

As teachers of presentation skills will likely confirm, while some students have a natural aptitude for the physical aspect of using notecards during a presentation, many students adopt habits that do not support an image of a confident, knowledgeable speaker.

The first habit is a tendency for some students to hold notecards in two hands at chest height. This posture was demonstrated to the students by the teacher and possible drawbacks were physically enacted. Drawbacks highlighted included:

- Creates a physical and psychological barrier with the audience
- Restricts ability to gesture and appears rigid
- Suggests dependence on the notecards and signals nervousness

Students were also shown a preferable way to hold and position notecards and the reasoning behind this: In one hand, at a lower height, closer to waist level and optionally to the side. This position is not intrusive and allows the presenter to focus on the audience.

The second notecard tip demonstrated was how to consult notecards and deliver content to the audience. Students may be inclined to just read from the notecards, defeating the objective of speaking naturally and engaging with the audience. The teacher illustrated how to hold the notecards naturally, glance and register the keywords, don't speak, look up and out to the audience, then speak.

The importance of repeated practice and adjustment of the content of the notecards to suit the students' needs was emphasized, while keeping in mind the effective foundational principles of notecard use that they had learned. Particularly for students who had previously relied on the complete reading of a script when presenting, the cognitive load of recalling and delivering content from notecard cues in combination with the physical interaction with the notecards and attention to the audience is a big change from their previous presenting strategy. In order to avoid overwhelming students and damaging student motivation for the post-intervention presentations and beyond, the teacher stressed the freedom to pause regularly and follow a slow pace if needed. The concept of the classroom as a safe space to practice new things and the audience role as patient supporters was recycled from previous classes and re-iterated.

5. Post-intervention instruments, findings and analysis

Three methods were used to assess the impact of the notecard classroom intervention, teacher observation from student presentations, a Microsoft Form survey and post-intervention student notecards.

5.1 Student presentations and teacher observations

The student presentations on the theme of an Animal Disease followed a similar procedure to the initial pre-intervention presentations (Section 2.1). Templates were provided for preparation, including a blank notecard template. One difference was that the student notecards were collected at the end of the presentations for analysis.

Table 6 below displays data gathered from teacher observations of script reading during student presentations both pre and post-intervention.

Table 6.

A Pre and Post-intervention Comparison of Teacher Observations of Continuous Script Reading During Student Presentations

	Presentation 1	Presentation 2	Post- intervention Presentation
Teacher Observation			
Proportion of students clearly reading from full scripts throughout the presentation.	21/45	13/45	0/45

Number of Students: 45

As far as the teacher could observe, there were no occurrences of continuous script reading in the post-intervention presentation. Moreover, students were all identified as either actively utilizing notecards during their presentations or attempting to recall and deliver using notecards.

5.2 Post-intervention student survey

Four multiple-answer type options were posed to assess student attitude to the notecards lesson, to confirm whether students had used notecards exclusively in the post-intervention presentation and elicit student attitude towards future use of notecards.

From the Table 7 below, it is apparent that 100% of the students participating expressed positive feedback regarding the usefulness of the teacher's guidance on notecards during the intervention and indicated that notecards were the sole materials they utilized during the presentation. Furthermore, a large majority of students showed an interest in employing notecards for future presentations, both for English presentations (97%) and presentations in Japanese (93%).

Table 7.

Survey Questions and Findings Exploring Student Attitudes at Different Phases in the Action Research Process

Post-intervention Presentation				
Survey Questions	Student Answers			
	Yes	Maybe	No	
1. Did you find the teacher guidance about why notecards can have a positive effect on presentation technique useful?	43	-	0	
2. For your Final Presentation (An Animal Disease), did you use notecards only (no other scripts or papers) when giving your presentation?	43	-	0	
3. After this course, would you consider making and using notecards again in the future when preparing for a presentation or other public speaking activity <u>in English</u> ?	25	17	1	
4. After this course, would you consider making and using notecards again in the future when preparing for a presentation or other public speaking activity <u>in Japanese</u> ?	24	16	3	

Number of Students = 43 (2 students failed to complete MS Form)

The final question in the post-intervention survey used a 5-point Likert scale to determine student evaluation of their post-intervention experience of using notecards for presenting.

A brief review of the questions and numbers in Table 8 reveals that the majority of students evaluated their personal experiences positively, with over 70% of the class agreeing with statements that aligned with the learner outcomes that were central to the objectives of this action research.

Practice is an essential component of notecard use, as described in Section 4.2.3, therefore 74% student satisfaction with effort in practicing is encouraging. Reading and rote memorization of scripts were identified as important causes for the lack of audience engagement by many students during the two earlier presentations.

In Table 8, comments ii., iii., and iv., the data shows that over 70% of students post intervention acknowledge that employing notecards allowed them to achieve better audience engagement and a more natural delivery when compared to these earlier approaches. 79% of students viewed their message delivery as successful, a positive final answer.

Table 8.*Survey Questions and Findings to Establish Range of Student Perceptions after Post-Intervention Notecard Use*

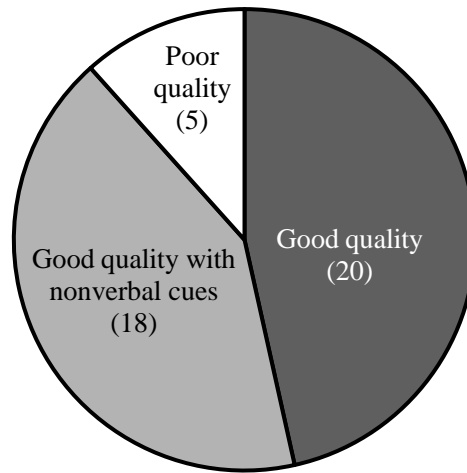
Post-intervention Presentation							
Survey Question	Strongly Agree *	Agree *	Neutral	Disagree #	Strongly disagree #	% positive responses *	%negative responses #
5. Consider your preparation and presenting of your Animal Disease presentation . How far do you agree or disagree with the comments below?							
i. I practiced my presentation with my notecards sufficiently.	14	18	7	1	3	74%	9%
ii. The notecards helped me to engage with the audience more effectively.	14	19	6	1	3	74%	9%
iii. I felt that I delivered the information more naturally than when reading a script.	14	17	6	2	4	74%	14%
iv. I felt that I delivered the information more naturally than when memorizing a script.	16	14	6	3	4	70%	16%
v. I managed to deliver my message in English successfully.	15	19	5	1	3	79%	9%
Number of Students = 43 (2 students failed to complete MS Form)							

5.3 Student notecard evaluation

The post-intervention student notecards were assessed based on how well students incorporated the features taught in the notecard lesson and were categorized using the following ratings.

1. Poor 2. Good 3. Good with added nonverbal cues

The findings were as follows.



Number of students = 43 (2 students did not submit notecards)

Figure 1.

Post-intervention student notecard quality: teacher ratings of poor, good and good with nonverbal cues

38/43 sets of notecards were assessed and categorized positively. Students had generally incorporated the elements that had been highlighted in the sample notecards during the taught intervention session and most notecards sets were judged to have the potential to support effective presentation delivery. 5 sets were judged as being unsatisfactory, 1 set due to a preponderance of sentences rather than keywords and at the other extreme, 4 sets due minimal content and no application of what had been taught.

6. Conclusion

The teacher guidance on the creation and use of notecards, implemented in response to the observed habit of uninterrupted word-for-word reading by EFL students and a reluctance to use notecards can be considered to have been a successful intervention. On identifying that the class as a whole had not previously received any practical training on the value of notecards as a presentation tool, the teacher-led notecard session proved

effective, as the majority of students subsequently created and made use of well-designed notecards during their presentations. Additionally, students provided positive feedback regarding the value of notecards and expressed an intention to use them in future presentations. However, teacher researchers need to be attentive to the fact that student survey answers may not be reliable, as discussed earlier. They may be motivated by perceived teacher expectations or the wish to be viewed favourably as a good student. In some cases, students may be prompted to select answers that could get them more points in an act of academic dishonesty.

Action research is a cyclical process that serves to stimulate educators to continuously reflect, examine and intercede in their classrooms when needed. By engaging in such action research studies, “...*both the teaching and the learning occurring in the classroom can be better tailored to fit the learners’ needs.*” (Ip, 2017). It can often raise more questions as the flow proceeds and that is certainly the case in this short study. The following areas of the study were identified through teacher reflection during this study as possible research options that could lead to investigation and improved pedagogical treatment of notecards in the communicative EFL classroom in the future.

- Eye contact and audience engagement when presenting – applying a systematic routine for practice using notecards
- Notecards strategies to help anxiety when presenting
- Notecards for English for Specific Purposes – incorporating technical language
- Considering learner preferences for alternative delivery choices

Ethics declaration

No funds, grants, or other support was received. The author of this manuscript has no conflict of interests to declare.

References

- Dornyei, Z. (2018). *Engaging language learners* [Video recording]. Cambridge University Press ELT. YouTube. Retrieved January 7 2025, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg6BSbpVgVU>.
- Falout, J., & Maruyama, M. (2004). A Comparative Study of Proficiency and Learner Demotivation. *The Language Teacher*, 28(8), 3–9.
- Fec, E. (2019). The Use of Note Cards in English Presentation Classes. *Tohoku University of Public Welfare and Liberal Arts, General Research Collection*, 35, 58-64
- Gershon, S. (2015). *Present Yourself Level 2 Student's Book: Viewpoints* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Ip, T. (2017). *JALT Linking Research to Action: A Simple Guide to Writing an Action Research Report* | *JALT Publications*. <https://jalt-publications.org/node/4985/articles/5631-linking-research-action-simple-guide-writing-action-research-report>
- Kikuchi, K. (2015). Demotivators in the Japanese EFL Context. In *Language Learning Motivation in Japan*, 206-224. Multilingual Matters.
- Pardede, P. (2020). Integrating the 4Cs into EFL Integrated Skills Learning. *JET (Journal of English Teaching)*, 6(1), 71–85. <https://doi.org/10.33541/jet.v6i1.190>
- Paxton, S., & Truxal, D. (2019). *From Chinmoku to Pera Pera: Teaching Presentation Skills at University in Japan*. <https://doi.org/10.14992/00017339>
- Sukmana, N., Koamriah, A., Bazarov, B., Patra, I., Hashim Alghazali, T. A., Ali Hussein Al-Khafaji, F., & Farhangi, F. (2023). Examining the Effects of Cue Cards on EFL Learners' Speaking Fluency, Accuracy, and Speaking Anxiety. *Education Research International*, 2023, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2023/8428325>

Warrick, A. (2023). Practical Approaches to Reducing the Reliance on Scripts Among English Presentation Students. *Journal of Multilingual Pedagogy and Practice*, 3.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Figure 1.

Student handout 1 for intervention stage (as described in 4.2 Teaching how to create effective notecards for presenting)

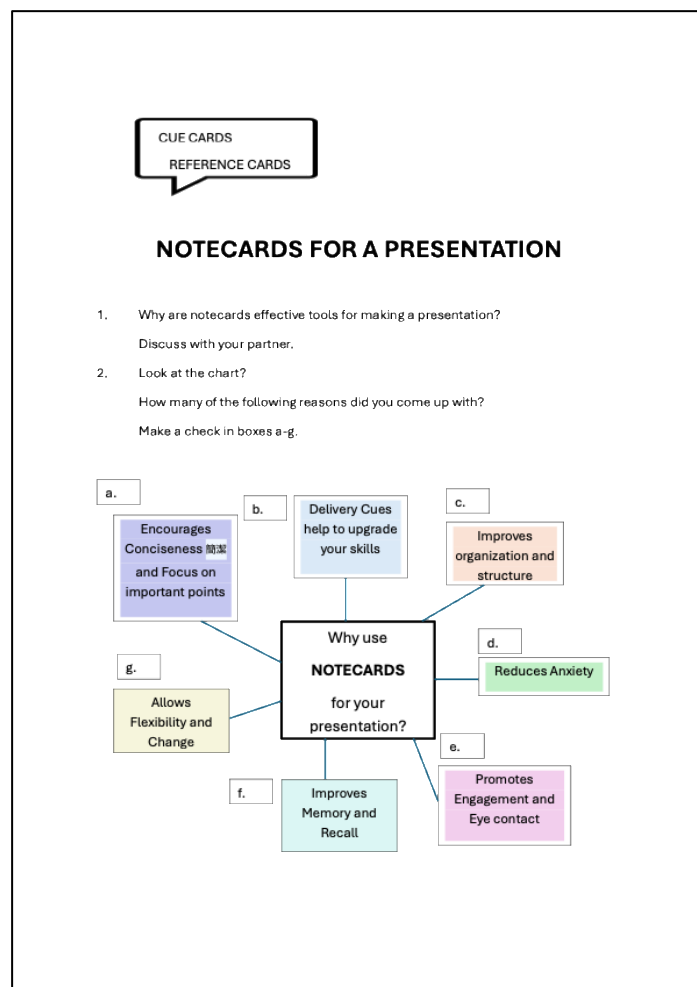


Figure 2.

Student handout 2 for intervention stage (as described in 4.2 Teaching how to create effective notecards for presenting)

Key points for making your notecards

- Some students prefer to type their notecards. Other students write by hand.
- Preferably use a notecard like this:



Or at least cut up an A4 sheet into 4 paper cards.

- Write in **large letters neatly** using a **bold pen**. Or use a **large simple font** if you are typing.
- Write on **one side of the card only**.
- **Number** and **label** each card.
- Do not put too much information on the card – **just keywords, no sentences**.
- There should be **open space** on your card so that you can see the words clearly.
- Use **bullet points** and **symbols** – make it easy for yourself to pick out the **main information** and **detail**.
- **Colour-code** challenging or technical words so that you can see them quickly.
- Write **delivery cues** on your notecards to remind yourself of skills you want to improve. For example:

- o Pause here
- o Use "... gesture
- o Point to "...." on slide
- o Look up
- o Eye contact with everyone
- o Slow down
- o Take your time
- o Smile

Use a bright colour to pick out the cue!

Figure 3.

Student handout 3 – sample animal disease presentation outline for intervention stage (as described in 4.2.2)

OUTLINE OF A SIMPLE PRESENTATION	EXAMPLE OF STUDENT OUTLINE FOR ANIMAL DISEASE PRESENTATION
A INTRODUCTION 1 Opening 2 TOPIC STATEMENT (including <i>Topic Preview 3, 4, 5</i>)	1 OPENING: Goats – useful, strong animals. Raised for milk, meat, wool Sometimes kept as pets. Importance of knowing goat diseases 2 THE TOPIC STATEMENT: Focus on Caprine Arthritis Encephalitis (CAE) TOPIC PREVIEW: Cause, Symptoms, Diagnosis, Treatment
B BODY SECTIONS 3 Topic sentence 1 and Detail 4 Topic sentence 2 and Detail 5 Topic sentence 3 and Detail 6 Topic sentence 3 and Detail	3,4,5... TOPIC SENTENCES AND DETAILS: 3 Body 1: What Cause s the Disease? • Virus: Caprine Arthritis Encephalitis Virus (CAEV) • Attacks immune system • Spreads through colostrum, (part of milk) and direct contact 4 Body 2: What are the Symptoms of CAE? • Arthritis: Swollen joints, problems walking, trouble moving • Encephalitis: Affects brain and spine (backbone), causes shaking, paralysis (can't move), coordination • General: Weight Loss and Poor Condition 5 Body 3: The Diagnosis of CAE • Blood Tests: Finds antibodies against the virus • PCR Test: Finds viral DNA in blood or tissue samples • Observation: Symptoms, lab tests confirm disease 6 Body 4: Treatment of CAE • No Cure • Management: Supportive Care (drugs) / Culling (killing to prevent spread) / Prevention
C CONCLUSION 7 Signal for ending 8 Review (<i>quick summary</i>) 9 Closing	7 SIGNAL: In conclusion, 8 REVIEW: CAE - serious disease, symptoms, no cure, testing important 9 CLOSING: Thank you for listening. I hope this presentation has helped you understand Caprine Arthritis Encephalitis in goats.

Figure 4.

Student handout 4 – sample animal disease notecards for intervention stage (as described in 4.2.2)

1
INTRODUCTION
EYE CONTACT

GOATS:

- a Useful, b strong animals
- Raised for 1 milk, 2 meat, 3 wool
- Sometimes kept as pets
- Important - goat diseases
- Today's Focus:

Caprine Arthritis Encephalitis (CAE) : 3 points:

SYMPTOMS DIAGNOSIS TREATMENT

2
SYMPTOMS OF CAE
BIG VOICE

1. Arthritis: Swollen joints, Point to show
Walking problems

2. Encephalitis: Brain / Spine problems
Shaking / paralysis