Improving Speaking Skills Among Elementary EFL Learners: Accentuating Learning Reinforcement and Classroom Engagement Through Unit-End Presentations

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The full implementation of the new *Course of Study* has shifted schools' focus in delivering their English classes. With the shift, teachers must design better learning activities to encourage the students, one of which is by doing an oral presentation. This paper examines the impacts of consistent exposure of students to oral presentation. Determining the level of how it affects their Learning Reinforcement and Classroom Engagement by interpreting it through the Likert scale, it was discovered that oral presentation significantly impacts these two aspects. The data from the sixth-grade students (n=98) of four schools in Osaka City clearly showed the benefits of doing speaking activities, exhibiting 56.47% growth in their self-perceived English level after a unit-by-unit six consecutive performances. The study's positive results imply encouraging more speaking practice to engage and reinforce students' learning and promote communicative confidence among students.

新学習指導要領の完全実施は学校の英語授業の行い方に重点を移す方向に転じた。この転換に伴い、教師が学生をやる気にさせるためには、より良い学習活動を実施する必要がある。そのうちの一つに口頭発表である。本稿では学生が口頭発表に一貫して触れる機会をもつことの影響について調査した。リッカート尺度を通じてそのことを解釈することにより、口頭発表が学生の学習強化と教室での取り組みにどのような影響を与えるのかに関する水準を決定すること、口頭発表がこれらの2つの側面に大きな影響を与えることを発見した。大阪市内の4小学校の6年生(n=98)のデータは、6回の連続した単元末パフォーマンスの後の自己評価による英語力レベルにおいて56.4%の伸びを示した。すなわち話す活動を行うことの有益さを明らかにした。この研究の肯定的な結果は学生を学習に取り組みさせ、学習を強化し、学生間のコミュニケーションの自信を促進するために話すことの活動をより多くおこなうことを奨励することを示唆している。

Keywords: Classroom Engagement, Elementary English, Language Reinforcement, Oral Presentation

The shift in teaching approach to achieve the educational goals for foreign language education has become the anchor of Japanese elementary schools' pedagogical strategies. They have reverted their focus in the students' immersion to the actual language production in place of the archaic method of translation, repetition, and memorization (Bax 2003; Caine 2008; East 2016; Haixiao & Clifford 2011; Jacobs & Farrell 2001;

Jacobs & Farrell 2003; Kustati 2013; Lai 2015; & Sasaki 2008). Grounded in these approaches is the concept of focusing on tasks and communication as indicators of effective learning activities and incorporating practical discourse or oral activities, such as speeches and presentations, to gauge overall language development. After all, the highest manifestation of learning a language is the ability of the L2 learners to communicate accurately and proficiently to other individuals who speak the same language in a different context (p. 34)" (Soureshjani & Ghanbari, 2012).

From April 2020, the new *Course of Study* for elementary learners was fully implemented. The new guideline rendered fifth and sixth grades seventy hours of English class within an academic year accompanied by formal assessments as it becomes an official subject of study. From the concept of "What should the teachers teach?", they have changed their perspective to "What should the students learn?", "How will they learn?" and "What can they do with English?". The new paradigm aims to nurture the three accepted English pillars identified by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT, 2018): knowledge/skills, thinking/judgement/expression, and strength toward learning/attitude toward learning. To create a more holistic development among learners, the four macros of English communication (reading, speaking, writing, and speaking) were divided into different significant aspects of subskills. Speaking is divided into two areas: communication and presentation. The step is to target each skill on a step-by-step basis not to overwhelm first-time learners with the difficulty of the language.

MEXT set these goals for foreign language class in elementary schools, first to gain abilities that can be used in actual communication, second to develop skills to be able to communicate one's thoughts and feeling, third to deepen the understanding of the culture of the foreign language and fourth to cultivate an attitude of proactively trying to communicate using the foreign language. The emphasis on realizing these goals has prompted educators to devise a better learning situation that will allow the learners to become the first-hand producers in language production. Teachers have recognized the benefits of oral presentation and communication in class, and thus, they are elevating these kinds of activities better than before (Al-Issa & Al-Qubtan 2010; Nguyen 2013; & Masmaliyeva 2014).

Many classrooms have started shifting to a more output-based orientation, minimizing the teacher's talk and more of that of the students. Students in this kind of classroom are guided to do learning activities designed to produce oral outputs without stressing the language's grammatical aspect. Activities to talk about familiar and simple things related to daily living, activities to introduce oneself using simple words and essential expressions, activities related to school life and community are just some content areas emphasized in the presentation. Although, in most cases, presenting in foreign language seems to be a hurdle to children (Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education, 2019). As stated by Pollard in 2008, speaking demands a great volume of ideas, vocabulary, communication, grammar, and pronunciation, and as a result, speaking is difficult to learn and acquire. Teachers who aim to explore oral activities in class should develop microsteps to help the students connect their learning. Instead of merely constructing textbook sentences and simply orating the memorized content, the presentation should be seen as an accumulation of hourly lessons (Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education, 2019). For that purpose, it is necessary to practice, establish learning content for each meeting repeatedly and provide context for the association of knowledge. Teachers should create

activities that allow students to recycle past target languages and incorporate them into their oral tasks at each unit's end.

Related Literature

In the MEXT Guidebook for Foreign Language Activities and Foreign Language Studies Training (2017), it was elaborated that it is vital to set up language activities that allow children to repeatedly use learning content such as simple words and phrases and essential expression that are authentic. Driven to improve students' communication abilities, the Ministry of Education has emphasized strengthening the activities that elicit students' oral skills. Oral presentation has been an excellent tool for teachers to assess students' learning achievements in all learning levels. Citing the work of Lim (2007), Miller & Ng, (1994), Mika (2006), Une-aree (2006), Soureshjani and Ghanbari (2012) have reminded the scholarly community about the importance of having a reliable and well-organized oral practice in the classroom.

Many scholars have also researched oral production in the classroom (Liang & Kelsen, 2018; Otoshi & Heffernen, 2008; Al-Hebaish & Mohammad, 2012) to explore the extension of the said practice to the learning of students in the language classroom. The results of their studies and other experts in the field have been promising as they outline significant benefits of this style not only towards the communication skills of the students but also to their language learning experiences as a whole. Riadil (2020) has concluded that students' speaking abilities are affected by performances in an oral presentation. He further exemplified that the development of grammar system, language selection, development of discourse, strategies in communication, and the selection of appropriate response to a situation are contributing factors that affect performance. Hence, sometimes students experience difficulties.

Weaving different scholarly knowledge Munbi (2011) outlined some benefits of such tasks for learners and language teachers. He emphasized that doing an oral presentation is beneficial because it can provide effective learning, empower the students, and foster autonomy among learners. From every stage of doing a presentation, it is rather certain that the students solely do eighty percent of activities. If the teacher had the lesson plan effectively, the students would be invited to engage with their classmates, as planning and decision-making fall on their hands with little to no intervention from the teacher. In this way, students are encouraged to search, ask, discover words, expressions, and materials they need to complete the task effectively. Independent task completion in these situations allows the students to develop confidence among themselves over time as they go through a repetitive process of language discovery, usage, and production. It is crucial to fulfilling this aspect because, as Yashime, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu in 2004 asserted, the willingness of students to participate in oral activities in the classroom is determined by their self-confidence.

Godev (2003) suggests that oral presentations could supplement students' oral skills while incorporating morpho-syntactic and discourse structure essential in all levels considering the appropriateness of the topic at hand. The study of Ahagari, Rassekh-Alqol, and Hamed (2013) also stressed the multifaceted nature of speaking, highlighting that by doing so, students are required to focus on content, pronunciation, diction, body language, eye contact, and other communicative skills. Indeed, by doing multiple speaking activities in the classroom, the students will be habituated to using these skills, which will easily allow them to apply them in actual communication.

Another significant benefit of oral presentation is presented in the study of Girard, Pinar, and Trapp in 2011. According to their findings, a significant development in their students' communication and presentation skills, an increased willingness to learn, and greater class participation and interaction are crucial effects of using oral presentations in the classroom. This is further supported by the work of Wilson and Brooks in 2014, as they also pointed out that doing the same practice in class encourages proper scaffolding of language knowledge, peer-to peer teaching and learning, language skills practice, independent learning, and higher level of education motivation.

Despite the large quantity of language production research in different language education journals, there is still a scarcity of research about oral presentation at the elementary EFL level. These mentioned studies have focused on students' language skills and development at higher education or university level. Some of them are also in ESL, not in EFL (Al-Nouh, Abdul-Kareem, & Taqi, 2015). Thus, to contribute to the knowledge in the field, we are prompted to investigate oral presentation and its relationship with classroom engagement and learning reinforcement in an elementary EFL class.

Background of the Study

Grade 6 students of five elementary schools in Osaka city have experienced fifty hours of English as foreign language activities in the previous years, from 3rd grade to fifth grade, using the textbook *Let's Try 1* in 3rd grade, *Let's Try 2* in 4th grade and *We Can 1!* in 5th grade. This year, under the new *Course of Study*, using the *Here We Go 6!* textbook by Mitsumura Publishing, learners spend two hours a week and a total of seventy hours in the 2020 academic year.

In English as foreign language activities, classes were assembled with activities centered on listening and speaking, and the focus was on learning English in a fun way by incorporating interactive activities and linguistic games. However, since it has become an official subject of study, it is also necessary to conduct a proper evaluation. Unit-end tests created by the textbook company are used in the said learning assessment, consisting of listening, reading, and writing. As for speaking, it was allotted once a semester, in the form of conversation, presentation by group, or individual performance.

In this paper, we focused on oral presentation. We investigated how consistent speaking activities influence children's engagement and learning reinforcement as they go through their English study with the continuous task to do a presentation using target language learned from the lesson and the previous—using recycled structures congruently to convey their ideas properly. English textbooks commonly suggest that students should be given oral presentation tasks three times during the whole year, but in this research, students were asked to do an oral presentation at each unit's end (individual, pair, group). The content for each presentation, the target language, and the presentation type are reflected in the table below.

Table 1
Presentation Content Table

Unit	Title	Presentation Content	Target Language	Type of Presentation
Unit 1	This is me	Students are tasked to introduce themselves and tell activities they are good at, the things they like, and their personal information	I am ~ I am from ~ I am good at ~ Where are you from? What are you good at? I like ~	Individual
Unit 2	Welcome to Japan	Students are asked to present seasonal events in Japan. They are also asked to explain activities that can be done in the events.	In spring, we have ~ You can enjoy~ What do you have in ~? What can you do?	Group
Unit 3	What do you want to watch?	J 1 /	Do you want to watch? Yes, I do. / No, I don't. What do you want to watch? Why? I want to watch ~ It's ~ How about you?	Pair
Unit 4	My summer vacation	Students must talk about their activities during their summer vacation by using the simple past tense of verbs.	What did you do in summer? I went to ~ I enjoyed~ How was it? It was~	Individual
Unit 5	He is famous. She is great.	Students should be able to introduce the people they respect or idolize. Describe their nature of work and characters.	Who is this? He is ~. He is a ~ I like ~	Group
Unit 6	This is my Town	Students are asked to introduce their own town to everyone. Explain the landmarks they have and the things that can be done in the area.	This is my town. Welcome to ~. We have ~. You can ~. We can ~.	Group

Research Questions

This research investigated four elementary schools' sixth-graders engagement in the classroom to answer the following questions:

- 1. What is the impact of continuous unit-end presentation on students' classroom engagement in terms of self-expression, willingness to participate, willingness to communicate, and confidence?
- 2. What is the impact of continuous unit-end presentation on the learning reinforcement of the students in the aspect of vocabulary and language knowledge, target language retention, pronunciation, and presentation skills?
- 3. How did continuous unit-end presentation affect the student's self-perception of their English level?

Methodology

Participants

This study's participants were ninety-eight (98) grade six students from four elementary schools in Osaka City. The students in the study took English classes under the instruction of the researchers. All of the respondents started their formal English education when they were in third grade. Although they have been studying the language for almost four years now, their rigorous oral presentation exposure started in the 2020 academic year which account to one presentation per unit adding up to nine presentations in the whole academic year. The student's exposure prior to 6th grade, on the other hand are, once or twice in the 5th grade and once to almost none in 3rd and 4th grade.

Instruments

The researchers developed a self-perception three-part Japanese questionnaire (Appendix A) for this study. This tool was used to gather the students' quantitative data to make it amenable to analysis. The first part of the questionnaire is aimed to collect data on their classroom engagement involving their confidence in class, willingness to communicate, willingness to participate, and self-expression. The purpose of the four questions is to measure the impact of oral presentation on the students' attitudes inside the classroom.

On the other hand, the second part evaluates learning reinforcement, which assesses their vocabulary and language knowledge, their target language retention, their pronunciation, and their presentation skills, geared toward the assessment of oral presentation as a scaffold of language learning. The last part of the questionnaire, which asks the students to self-assess their English level, is conducted to solicit awareness of their learning progress and for the researchers to know the students' feedback on their foreign language development.

Numerical values were assigned for each potential choice, and the weighted average of the responses was computed after surveying. For easier understanding of the interpretation of the numerical values, the point scale was made with visual representation using emotional facial icons.

Data Collection and Analysis

After deciding on the questionnaires' final design, the researchers have asked each school's principal's permission to distribute questionnaires and collect data from the students. Data gathering was conducted at the end of the second semester after the final

presentation for unit six. The purpose and content of the said survey were carefully explained to the students before filling in to ensure data reliability. The tabulation of data was done after the administration of the survey. The weighted average of each factor was calculated and interpreted using the 5-points Likert scale to determine if the impact of oral presentation on both learning reinforcement and classroom engagement. To determine the minimum and the maximum length of the 5-point Likert type scale, the range is calculated by (5-1=4) then divided by five as it is the greatest value of the scale $(4\div 5=0.80)$. Afterwards, number one which is the least value in the scale was added in order to identify the maximum of this cell. The length of cells is shown below:

Table 2
Likert Scale

Equivalent	Interpretation	Numerical Value Range
5	Excellent	4.20-5.00
4	Very good	3.40-4.19
3	Good	2.60-3.39
2	Fair	1.80-2.59
1	Poor	1.00-1.79

Aside from the questionnaire for data collection, the researchers have also employed observation method to take note of the qualitative data, i.e. attitude and motivation, of the students before, during, and after the conduct of oral presentations.

With proper permission from all the concerned people, the questionnaire's administration took a week to finish. Students in every school finished answering the questionnaire within ten minutes. This paper uses descriptive statistics in the analysis and presentation of data.

Findings

The students were reserved during the first presentation; they had a minimum level of engagement and confidence in standing in front of the class. Furthermore, their ability to integrate technical aspects of presentation is at almost zero. Observing their attitude in the class as they were exposed to presentation consecutively and at the end of the last presentation, on the other hand, it was seen that there are evident changes in the mindset of the students.

Oral Presentation on Classroom Engagement and Learning Reinforcement

Figure 1
Impact of Oral Presentation on Classroom Engagement

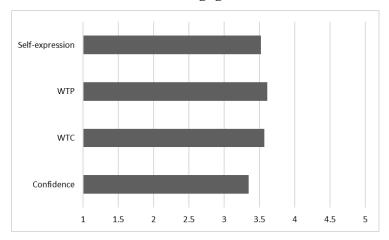


Figure 1 shows how the continued practice of oral presentation improved different aspects of the students' classroom engagement. With a general weighted average of 3.51, it implies that the impact is very good. They were also keen to ask expressions that were not written in the book to clarify their ideas. The student's engagement in the classroom as observed by the researchers also vigorously increased as they learned more about the subject of study. In the individual aspects of classroom engagement, willingness to participate is the most affected with 3.61; this signifies that as the students practice communication in the classroom, their motivation to indulge themselves more is not only to the study but also to socializing in general. Willingness to communicate with 3.57 came second as the most influenced. They were followed by self-expression 3.52 and confidence 3.34 at third and fourth spot, respectively. The confidence of the students going up allowed them to express themselves more in English. The hesitation in standing during recitation or going in front of the class during presentation changed to the active raising of hands and willingness to answer.

Figure 2
Impact of Oral Presentation on Learning Reinforcement

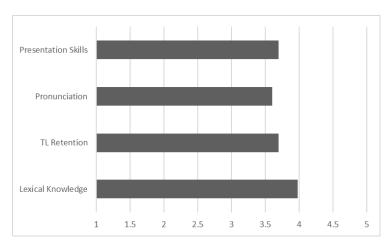
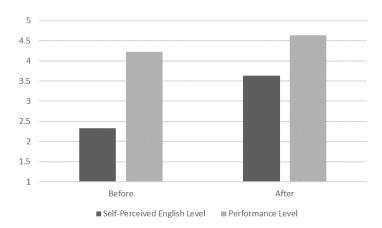


Figure 2 indicates the level of influence of oral presentation in the reinforcement of learning of the students. The 3.74 weighted average proves that incorporating speech activities has a very good impact because it practices the students' art of speaking and helps them remember information. Lexical knowledge, for example, with 3.98, means that students could improve their vocabulary because they could produce the language repetitively. Target language retention, on the other, gaining the same weighted average with presentation skills came as the second highest. Asking students to perform target language recycling to make their presentation longer and better allowed them to practice the expressions of the current topic and past topics. Furthermore, as they do a lot of presentations, they exhibit a better mindset on planning, delivering, and executing plans effectively. Most of them started to think about what kind of gestures to integrate or what visual design was more effective during the presentation. Although pronunciation gained the lowest average of 3.60, it is still interpreted as very good. Students comparing the pronunciation quality from the first and latest encounter demonstrated 10 percent to almost zero katakana accent in the latest presentation.

Self-Perceived English Level and Performance Level

Figure 3
Comparison of Self-Perceived English Level and Performance Level



Comparing the self-perceived English level of students and their performance level evaluated by their teachers is represented in Figure 3. It can be noted that the improvement of the English level as perceived by the students has increased substantially. From the initial average of 2.33 (before), after numerous oral production activities, students acknowledged that their English improved at 3.63 (latest) average with a 56.47% growth rate. The number figures entail that with the help of spoken activities, the English skills of the student could be doubled. In the latest presentation of the students, some of them even used expressions that were not included in their textbook or in their curriculum. Their interest in delivering a better presentation has boosted their learning progress. On the other hand, although there is an increase in the performance level, we cannot see much difference, unlike the English level. The slight difference in the performance grades might be caused by the teachers being lenient with the students considering their oral presentation backgrounds. The first performance has more flow than the last, but since the learning at the former compared to the latter is much less, the grading is less strict.

The performance level is 4.64 on average (latest) from the original 4.22 (before), with an improvement rate of 9.95 percent. The data implies that the students retained their enthusiasm throughout the study and performed better at the latest performance.

Classroom Engagement and Learning Reinforcement

Figure 4
Learning Reinforcement and Classroom Engagement in Scatter Plot

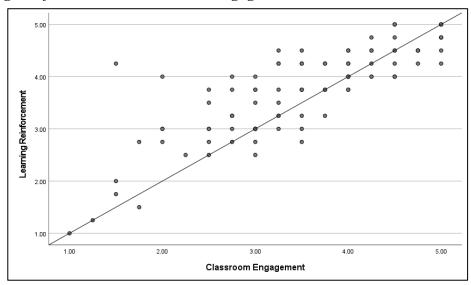


Figure 4 illustrates the relationship between the two variables in this study. The upward trend of the variables suggests a close relationship whereas, if the classroom engagement increases, so will the learning reinforcement. In the classroom setting, it is apparent that students who are more engaged in the lessons retain more knowledge than those who are not. Learners immersed in using the language patterns during freer practice and productive activities perform better in the presentations and are active during recitations and discussions. Learning patterns showed flawless learner growth and a faster absorption when the language is produced, although it varies depending on the target language. We can interpret that by using oral presentation in engaging the students in the classroom and using oral-based production practice in the classroom, the student retains more knowledge from the lesson.

The illustrations above have shown the aggregate results from five schools. For more specific details on the perception of the students per school, see Appendix B. Across all schools it can be observed that the statistics on the perceived English level and performance of the students are very closed to each other. The mean of each subcategorical aspect of classroom engagement and learning reinforcement in Appendix B also shows the positive apprehension of the students which imply that the students in all schools received positive impact by doing presentations.

Conclusion

Oral presentation is usually frowned upon in elementary classes because of the difficulty of preparation and actual delivery, as well as the students' attitude toward the activity. Students and teachers need plenty of time to prepare, taking almost two to three hours of

classes to implement it successfully. Moreover, due to the influence of the learning environment, the confidence and initiative of the students to collaborate and take the stage are aggravated. In a classroom scenario as observed by the researchers, whenever a teacher announced that there would be a presentation in the classroom, the students usually respond negatively with side comments like "mendokusai" (troublesome), "muzukashii" (difficult), or "iya da" (I hate that). Due to this, the utilization of this strategy in reinforcing the student's learning is becoming a challenge as the students resist doing such activities. Not to mention, attitudinal factors such as shyness and timidity contribute to more vigorous opposition of students and hinder the instructors in pushing the students to perform or present in the classroom. Nevertheless, researchers have found significant data that signifies those students will successfully retain lesson contents using the said strategy in this research. With an oral presentation, teachers can also bridge the gap caused by the lack of an English-speaking environment by creating a platform for students to assume a situation where they can only speak English.

In conclusion, following the relativity between learning reinforcement and classroom engagement, oral presentation has proven that the method bears a good impact on highlighted aspects of learning with proper utilization. It also is an excellent strategy to encourage children to be more communicative in the classroom and reduce speaking hindrances such as shyness or fear of grammar mistakes in oral production. In the four schools that the researchers have taught, the positive result of the questionnaires shows the effectiveness of using this strategy to provide the students with first-hand experience in English communication. Oral presentation, in that sense, is fueling the student's learning reinforcement and classroom engagement, elevating their interests, skills, and drive to learn the English language.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study focused only on the effect of oral presentation on classroom engagement and learning reinforcement. The results show the responses of the 98 students of four schools and do not reflect the whole population of elementary schools in Osaka City. Furthermore, pre-test for the aspects is not conducted which does not allow for a comparison of pre and post analysis of student perceptions.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Questionnaire

英語の授業アンケート

年 組 番号 男 · 女

- このアンケートは、学習についてたずねるものです。
- それぞれの質問を読み、あてはまるものやあなたの考えに最も近いものを選んで、 その番号を○でかこんでください。











- 1-あてはまらない
- 2-どちらかといえば、あてはまらない
- 3 どちらともいえない
- 4-どちらかといえばあてはまる 5-あてはまる
- 1)教室での取り組み
- 1. 自信

プレゼンテーションを行う際に、英語の授業に対する自信は高まっていましたか?











2. コミュニケーションへの意欲

プレゼンテーションを行う際に、クラスメートとコミュニケーションを取る意欲はありましたか?











3. 参加する意欲

プレゼンテーションをやってみて、あなたは英語の授業にもっと積極的に参加しようと思いましたか?











4. 自己

プレゼンテーションをやってみて、あなたは自分が思いついたことを表現することができましたか?











2 強化学習

1. 語彙と言語知識

プレゼンテーションをやってみて、授業で習った言葉を思い出しながら、語彙(単語・語句) の知識を増やすことができましたか?











2. ターゲット言語の保持

プレゼンテーションをやってみて、あなたはその単元で学習した表現を練習し、それを習得することができましたか?











3. 発音

プレゼンテーションをやってみて、授業で正しい発音を練習したことにより発音が上手くなりま したか?











4. プレゼンテーション能力

プレゼンテーションをやってみて、プレゼンテーションをするときに大切しなければならないことを学び実践することができましたか?











3 最初の授業と今の英語のレベルを自己評価しましょう。

一番初めの時











今(色んなプレゼンテーションの後)











Appendix B

Detailed Tables and Graphs of Results

Table 3

Classroom Engagement: Weighted Mean Average of the CE Factors

Factors in CE	Average	Interpretation
Confidence	3.34	Good
Willingness to Communicate	3.57	Very Good
Willingness to Participate	3.61	Very Good
Self-Expression	3.52	Very Good
Weighted mean average	3.51	Very Good

Table 4

Learning Reinforcement: Weighted Mean Average of the LE Factors

Factors in LE	Average	Interpretation
Lexical Knowledge	3.98	Very Good
Target Language Retention	3.69	Very Good
Pronunciation	3.60	Very Good
Presentation Skills	3.69	Very Good
Weighted mean average	3.74	Very Good

Figure 5
Comparison of the First Performance Score and the Last Performance Score per School

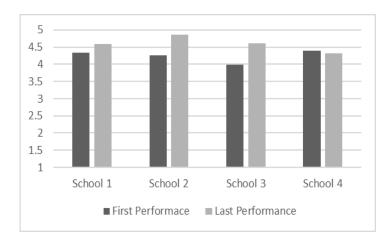


Figure 6

Comparison of self-perceived level of English before and After Series of Unit-end
Presentations per School

