

# Inaugural Speech Contest at The University of Fukuchiyama

- Facilitating an English Event Online -

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## *Abstract*

Opportunities for learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) are challenging to create for administrators and teachers alike. While experiencing a global pandemic adds further complications to the task. In that respect, activities such as speech contests are ideal because they can be changed from face-to-face to online without interrupting the planning process. This paper will provide a guide in designing a speech contest for ESL programs under pandemic conditions. Finding participants, training contestants, and establishing criteria for finding a winner requires forethought. Given the dynamics the contest faced, forced judges and contestants to be physically located in different locations. Consequently, they were in their homes or in their research laboratories. Nevertheless, with modern technology, we're able to be connected on a webinar simultaneously using various applications which makes facilitating contests possible.

*Keywords: Fluency, Pronunciation, Contest Guidelines, Teacher Training, Webinar, Google Applications,*

## *1. Introduction:*

Inside the Japanese Association of Language Teachers (JALT) speech contests fall under the Performance in Education as one of their special interest groups. Since the late 1970s English language teachers have been collaborating in JALT to improve communication throughout the country. Including, sharing ideas on speeches, debates, or some form of production. Within that organization, organizers of events such as this year's first Fukuchiyama contest. In addition to JALT, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, Science and Technology (MEXT) has expressed ideas for language development over the past two decades. Insisting high school graduates to communicate in English while possessing the ability to use ESL skills in their workplaces after graduating from university (MEXT, 2003).

It is a well-established fact public speaking causes anxiety. The common psychological reactions Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, (1986: p.128) indicate cause stress. This includes, "self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process". Encouraging students to perform at their best, they need to feel as determined as possible. Which Dörnyei (2005) points out in his extensive research on motivation. This view looks at the classroom setting by prompting student's self-images up for real-life interactions outside their normal interactions. In this space, they see themselves as confident speakers with a

message to share. Undoubtedly, if speakers of a second language are well prepared then they would be more confident to stand up in front of others and communicate in their foreign tongue.

## 2. Background:

To provide students at Fukuchiyama University the chance to study English outside the regular classroom, a speech contest was arranged to be held in December 2021. Through the university's Global Committee, this event was conducted on a weekday during lunchtime. Unfortunately, due to the coronavirus pandemic, it was decided to not perform face-to-face. In a department meeting before the start of the second semester, like all regular English classes, the contest was held on Zoom. Meaning, the practicality of holding an event like this was going to have always going to cause concerns. To keep the flow of the competition as smooth as possible for the participants, a speech was issued for all to use. The Global Committee agreed the first 33 seconds of Steve Jobs' 'Motivation Speech' was suitable. Previously this Steve Jobs talk on motivation was performed at Momoyama Gakuin University (MGU) in 2019.

Analysis of questionnaires implemented after the MGU contest found seven out of nine students felt they had improved their English skills. Other areas where improvement was identified are shown in table 1. One of the surprising results from this was students did not feel their listening skills had improved. However, those results could be seen as ambiguous due to semantic differences in what constitutes listening. Table 1 from a questionnaire issued at MGU by Lilley, Walsh, and Katanoda (2020) illustrates the English skill areas participants believed they could improve upon (n=9, multiple responses allowed).

Table 1.

Speaking	Pronunciation	Reading	Writing	Listening
7	4	3	3	1

Although, unlike that event, there was only one section for students to enter at Fukuchiyama University. Whereas, MGU also held a competition for international students to read Japanese speeches. Along with high-level English proficiency Japanese students who created their own speeches. One of the main reasons for choosing a speech contest was for other university instructors to create collaboration between Chinese and Korean speakers. Regardless of those intentions, they felt it would not be as popular in those languages, so only an English-speaking contest went ahead. Below in table 2. there is a schedule of how the Global event took place from the onset. With points for the Global members to schedule and attend:

Table 2.

Activity:	Time
1st Global Committee Meeting: Introduced the idea to have a speech contest in the second semester to members. That included the following points, important dates, judging, advertising (making a flyer), transcript of the Steve Jobs Speech (including Youtube clip)	28th July 2021
Announcement to English Teachers at Fukuchiyama there will be a Speech Contest. Teachers only announced there will be a contest.	2nd Sept 2021
Unofficial meeting with a small group of committee members points included the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Important dates (Please double check)</i></li> <li>2. <i>Advertising (flyer) correcting mistakes</i></li> <li>3. <i>Prizes (Amazon gift vouchers)</i></li> <li>4. <i>Judging (Confirmation To be announced in December)</i></li> <li>5. <i>Participants contact information</i></li> <li>6. <i>Zoom URL and regulations</i></li> <li>7. <i>Post competition survey</i></li> <li>8. <i>Steve Jobs Speech</i></li> </ol>	6th October 2021
2nd Global Committee Meeting: Prize Money (¥18,000) was organized. Flyer and entry form on Google Forms. Decision made to go online made. Volunteers for judges. Promotion from English teachers on campus during their online classes. Announcement inside faculty meetings.	13th October 2021
3rd Global Committee Meeting: Flyer created with important dates confirmed. Google forms for entry and barcodes for Youtube clips. Volunteers and judging information conceptualized. Calls for presentation on December 6th (maximum 10 entries)	9th November 2021
Committee Member Training included the following: <p>Point 1. Scoring on Google Sheets.</p> <p>Point 2. Timing and event flow: We only have 30 min and there are 9 contestants.</p> <p>Point 3. Judging criteria.</p>	15th December 2021
Student Training included the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Memorize Sentences: Take a look at the start of the sentence.</li> <li>2. <b>Timing: The target is 33 seconds.</b> <a href="https://youtu.be/VJCXwxvLNkY">https://youtu.be/VJCXwxvLNkY</a></li> <li>3. Rhythm and intonation (Copy Steve Jobs)</li> <li>4. <b>Presentation style: Shows confidence and is neatly dressed.</b></li> <li>5. Equipment: The sound and camera is working perfectly</li> </ol>	15th December 2021

### 3. Research Questions:

- I. Can the model of this Speech Contest be incorporated into future English programs?
- II. What are the key points of this activity?
- III. How can this year's Speech Contest be improved?

### 4. Methodology

Mallette & Barone (2013) assert Google as the best platform for students to hand in assignments due to its ability to share information simultaneously. The contest also made good use of Google with email, forms, and spreadsheets. Despite, Google Hangouts their interactive presentation application being an option, the contest was held in Zoom. Keeping in mind, Hangouts has a speaking translation option which currently Zoom does not. What it does have is the option to go into breakout rooms. While students gave speeches, their peers waited without access or with no ability to record. Obviously, for security reasons privacy was at the forefront.

#### 4.1 Training

Table 3. Recitation Speech Script Author: Steve Jobs

STEVE JOBS: MOTIVATION (Read English aloud in about 33 seconds)

"The only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work.  
心からの満足感を得るにはあなたがすべきだと思うことをすること。  
And, the only way to do great work is to love what you do.  
そしてその満足感を得るには愛をもって遂行すること。  
If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. And, don't settle.  
もしまだすべきことが見つからないなら探し続けること。立ち止まることなく。  
As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it.  
心をつくせば、方向性も見えてくるはず。  
Sometimes, life is going to hit you in the head with a brick. Don't lose faith.  
時に人生は困難を伴うものだが、必ず見つかると思い続けること。  
I'm convinced that the only thing that kept me going, is that I loved what I did.  
私が前に進み続けられるのは私が信じるところを貫いたから。  
You've got to find what you love.  
あなたがすべきことは何か、愛をもって 遂行すべきことは何か、  
それを見つけることを忘れないでほしい。  
(Translated by Professor Hiroko Katanoda)

In preparation for the contest, training for both judges and participants broke down the speech into smaller sentences. It focused on the following parts of the speech as seen in the fifth sentence of the speech:

**/ SOMETimes, life is going to hit-you-in-the-head-with-a-brick. DON'T LOSE FAITH/**

Isolating this sentence was to help judges to consider pronunciation and fluency. This key section starts by stressing 'sometimes'. Rossi, De Capua, Pasqualetti, Ulivelli, Fadiga (2008) identify common adverbs, for example, "*always, generally, usually, frequently, often, sometimes, occasionally, hardly ever, rarely, seldom, never*". This is followed with idioms, "hit you in the head with a brick" as well as, "don't lose faith". Those idioms in the second point, Irujo (1986b) establishes their use in ESL as problematic and require explanation. For instance, "idioms do not say what they mean" because they are not literal" (p. 326). For good teaching practice, instructors need to keep in mind, to make the second language learner's task in learning the language easier. It would help if they explained meanings of words through using synonyms or how they are provide examples within grammar. Point 1, below arranges adverbs of frequency in their percentage of, 'how often'. Point 2, gives the meaning of the idiom in direct terms.

Point 1. Examples of adverbs of frequency:

Always 100% of the time/ Almost always 80% of the time/ Often 70% of the time/  
SOMETIMES 50% of the time/ hardly ever 20% of the time/ never 0% of the time.

Point 2. Idioms (use synonyms)

Hit you in the head with a brick, meaning: You will be in bad situations.

Don't lose faith, meaning: Don't give up, stay strong.

## 4.2 Judging Criteria

Even though the judges had the flexibility to score with their 25 points any way they chose, they were provided with the following criteria to use as a guide:

Table 4.

- I. memorizing,
- II. timing (33 seconds)
- III. rhythm and intonation,
- IV. presentation style,
- V. use of equipment.

Without regards to the student's level, before training the students began, the criteria identified the students had to memorize the script. Although, after the training session, this was changed due to the student's inability to memorize the entire script. The adjustment asked judges to assess if students could memorize large chunks of information. This would affect the rhythm and intonation as well as the presentation style. Again, it should be noted that judges were not forced to support their scoring, Table 4 was only used as a guide.

## 5. Results and Analysis

The contest took forty-five minutes to complete and ran five minutes overtime. This was due to last-minute problems with connections and judges logging on. The contest had a backup judge which came into effect. Also, three students dropped out within twenty-four hours of the start. It appears they did not feel confident to speak inside a competition for personal reasons. All three did not attend training sessions or make any excuse as to why they chose not to compete. Additionally, one student that was not known to have entered by organizers appear at the start. They were allowed in, however, that could have caused a lot of problems if there were more than one. It should also be noted, most

of the students presented using their mobile phones. So, the quality of their presentation was marginalized. Finally, below are two students feedback moments after the contest. They include the following:

Student #1

*"I don't have so much opportunity to speak English in front of people, I really had a great time."*

Student #2

*"I had a very good experience. I will participate again."*

Looking below at the scoring table in Table 5 shows that the contestants all performed admirably. Going by those scores, you would have to say it was a successful competition with only one point of clear difference. Judge #1 has contestant #4 as their highest scoring speaker. Furthermore, Judge #1 and #4 both had significant scoring differences, whereas, Judges #2 and #3 were close. Even still, this scoring system takes out the difference in opinions and goes to the final score. This process cuts out arguments between judges and identifies a clear winner. In the case there was a draw, the head of the Global Committee was going to decide the outright winner.

Table 5.

Students	Judge #1 / 25	Judge #2 / 25	Judge #3 /25	Judge #4 /25	Total points /100
#1	20	20	20	20	80
#2	16	18	17	15	66
#3 Winner (¥10,000)	23	23	23	25	94
#4 Third (¥3,000)	24	20	20	20	84
#5	17	18	18	15	68
#6	15	21	21	15	72
#7 Second (¥5,000)	21	23	22	20	86

## 6. Future Thoughts

In the future thoughts from this study have considered the following points:

- I. Include Chinese or Korean categories for the contests.
- II. Practice sessions conducted in foundations English Classes.
- III. Combining events with a Christmas party.
- IV. A + B Categories (Steve Jobs speech/ Student create their speeches like in MGU's 2019 contest)
- V. Including students to get involved in the judging process.

## 7. Conclusion

Students' ability to memorize speeches was not as high as initially expected and in preparing for contests, it is necessary to keep scoring expectations to a limit. This area could potentially cause fragments between staff. Also, given the overall winner of the event attended a training session and improved considerably with instruction. It would be to the contestant's benefit to understand the judging criteria and practice accordingly prior to the presentation. Other than the performances, judging flowed relatively smoothly, although we did run 5 minutes over (12:45 pm) and one of the judges had internet issues. This could have caused a bigger issue if the main organizer's personal computer broke down. Furthermore, in the case more students drop out the contest may have been a complete failure. Nevertheless, given the strict timelines, it would have been beneficial if instructions were provided for the contestants well in advance. Instead of having to explain individually before each presentation. All the same, the event was relatively successful due to the fact all members of staff supported each other which created a warm environment conducive for an English event like a Speech Contest.

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